CORONET

THE DON IS DEAD

In the thundering tradition of *The Godfather*, a gripping, savagely detailed story of ruthless men locked in a vicious struggle for power.

Nick Quarry

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The Accountant sat naked in a large black leather armchair, watching the girl with slowly rising lust. Her name was Enid, and she wasn't more than eighteen. She was a natural redhead with a delightful sprinkle of freckles on her pert, little-girl face and her slender, naked body. She wasn't an amateur, but she looked a little frightened as she crouched there on her hands and knees in the middle of the thick bedroom carpet. The only thing she wore was a dog collar fastened around her neck.

She began to crawl towards him . . .

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This one is for Noga.

I

DEATH

ONE

TONY Fargo sat in the dark room and watched the night-shadowed street and parking lot below.

His fingers stroked the oiled metal and wood of a high-powered rifle lying across the arms of his chair.

He looked relaxed. He sat comfortably in a battered armchair he had pulled over beside the open window. His shoes were off and his sports shirt was unbuttoned, baring a heavily muscled, hairless chest. On the floor beside him the big leather suitcase waited, closed and locked.

He waited patiently, watching the street below.

There was something peasantlike in the stolid, stoic calm of his waiting. Though he'd been born in America, the blood of generations of Sicilian mountain shepherds ran in his veins. It was plainly written in the solid strength of his wide, blunt-boned face, his stocky build, the short powerful arms and legs.

He had spent a good part of his thirty years at jobs like this that were mostly waiting.

There was a man he knew who had been an anti-sniper for the Marines in the Korean War. The guy said he'd been good at it out of fear. Because when it was sniper against sniper, the first one to move and reveal his position was likely to be the one that got killed. And this guy claimed he was always so scared he could stay still for a whole week without even scratching his nose.

Tony Fargo figured that if he had been dumb enough to let himself get drafted, he'd have made a good antisniper sniper. Not out of fear. The kind of nervous tension he operated under didn't have much fear in it; maybe he lacked the imagination. But he had the kind of patience

you found in sports fishermen, for whom long hours of waiting were not just a preliminary to catching a fish but part of the pleasure of the game.

The room in which Tony sat was the living room of a small third-floor rear brownstone apartment in a seedy section of the city, a few blocks from the railroad freight yards. He had turned off the lights in the room. The radio was on softly, but he wasn't really listening to it; just letting its sound soothe his nerves. Through the closed door of the bedroom he could hear another sound. Frankie and the girl were going at it again.

In a way he envied Frankie. When Tony was on a job, he was devoid of that kind of lust. It was as though his sex drive was shortcircuited. He couldn't have gotten it up for Raquel Welch.

But the girl shouldn't have been there. She was just a hooker, and she didn't know what was going on; but she could be an extra complication.

That was the trouble with Frank Regalbuto. Tony liked him; Frank was tough, quick witted, happy-go-lucky; a good-humored companion. But he could also be irresponsible. At twenty-seven Frankie should have been too experienced to pull a stupid kid's trick like this.

Frankie had been given the job of finding them a safe place from which they could watch that street out there. By the time Tony arrived and found the girl went with the apartment, it was too late to find another place. To have sent her away wouldn't have helped. If anything went wrong, she'd be able to say they'd been there.

Tony was no longer irritated about the girl. He'd absorbed it; her presence merely added another dimension to the job.

If anything went wrong, he'd have to kill her.

It would be on Frankie's head, not his.

Tony looked at the luminous dial of the watch strapped to his wrist. It was a few minutes past midnight. Almost time.

At quarter past midnight the station wagon carrying the Arab and the Corsican entered the city.

Their destination was to the left. The Arab turned right.

His thin hands were slippery on the wheel. His heart thudded dully, and his stomach was burning. What they were carrying in the car meant a fortune for each of them, even split two ways and deducting expenses. But it had been a long, agonizingly involved trip from Lebanon. He felt as though he had aged a year for every mile of it.

If they now managed to make the delivery and pickup safely, he swore to himself he would never take on another transportation contract again. He would go back to being what he'd been, just a broker, a middleman between the Turkish smugglers and the Beirut buyers, satisfied with smaller but less nerve-twisting profits.

Beside him the big, burly Corsican was turned around on the front seat, his narrowed gray eyes watching the streets behind them as the Arab turned one corner after another at random.

The headlights that had been behind them as they'd approached the city were no longer in sight.

"You can relax," he told the Arab. "They weren't following us."

The Arab glanced at the rear-view mirror. "Maybe they just turned off their lights."

The Corsican continued to study the streets behind them for a full minute. "No."

"Suppose you're wrong? If they were following us, they could be in radio communication with other cars up ahead. Suppose—"

The Corsican quietly cut him short. "You've been seeing police in every shadow the whole trip."

"It could be worse than the police. Highjackers . . ."

"Well," the Corsican said philosophically, "that's why you brought *me* along."

He turned forward and put his Luger automatic down on a folded raincoat on the seat between them. He picked up a city map and studied it, glanced out at the street signs as the car slowed at an intersection.

"Turn left here."

The Arab made the turn.

"Left again," the Corsican said after two blocks.

There was little traffic in the area at this time of night. But the Arab kept the speed down to thirty miles an hour as they headed toward the rendezvous.

The Corsican's eyes flicked to the side streets they passed. Every few blocks he looked behind them again.

It was twenty minutes to one when the station wagon turned into the street Tony Fargo was watching.

The Arab slowed to a crawl. The Corsican studied the area in all directions.

"It looks clear to me," he said finally.

The Arab licked salty sweat from his upper lip and turned the station wagon into the parking lot. He stopped beside the small booth at the entrance. A sleepy-eyed black attendant came out as the Corsican covered the gun with the raincoat.

"How long you gonna be?"

"All night," the Corsican told him. His English was strongly accented, but understandable. "Perhaps tomorrow also. Even longer, perhaps."

"It's a five-dollar deposit. You get a refund if you're less than twenty-four hours. If you leave it longer, you pay more when you take it out. Fifty cents each hour or under. Or another five bucks for each twenty-four hours."

The Corsican got some bills from his pocket. It took him time to sort the unfamiliar currency. He finally poked a five-dollar bill through the window.

"Yes?"

The attendant pointed to a space by the fence, between a panel truck and a red Firebird. "You can pull her in over there."

"Thank you."

The Arab pulled into the space and cut the motor. The Corsican picked up the Luger in his right hand. His finger slid across the trigger as he draped the raincoat over the gun, hiding it. He climbed out and surveyed the area slowly and warily. He continued to do so as the Arab set the

brake, turned off the lights, and then got a key from his pocket and locked the special steering mechanism security device. If anyone broke into the car, they'd find it a difficult and noisy job to break that, too, before they could drive away.

The Arab climbed out of the station wagon. He locked the front doors, checked the rear ones to make sure they were locked. The Corsican continued to study the parking lot, the shadowed streets and alleys, the surrounding buildings.

He didn't see anyone watching them. But he knew someone was. He just hoped they were only being watched by the ones who were supposed to be there.

He looked at the Arab, who in spite of his nervousness looked reluctant to leave the station wagon and its precious hidden cargo.

"Come on," he snapped.

The Arab followed him out of the parking lot. The Corsican's finger was taut on the trigger of the Luger concealed under the raincoat.

They walked a block, and then the Corsican stopped. He looked behind them for a few seconds. Then he put on the raincoat and slipped the gun in the pocket. But he didn't take his hand away from it.

They circled the block and entered a small transient hotel called the Armitage. Checking in was simple. The room had been reserved for them that morning. The clerk took them up to it. The Corsican tipped him and locked the door as the Arab went between the twin beds and looked out the window.

From it they could see the station wagon below.

From the window directly across from the rear of the Hotel Armitage, Tony Fargo had watched them park and leave the station wagon. After they were gone, he continued to watch the parking lot and the approaches to the street beside it. An occasional car went by and sometimes a pedestrian hurrying home. As the night wore on, both became rarer.

At ten of two a drunk came around the corner. He stumbled his weary way along the block across the street. When he was alongside the wall of the building next to the rear of the Armitage, he seemed to trip over his own feet. He fell against the wall and leaned there, his face turned toward the parking lot.

Tony Fargo picked up a pair of field glasses which lay beside his snub-nosed Colt Cobra .38 revolver on the table. He focused the glasses on the man leaning against the wall.

He looked like a drunk, all right. A skid-row bum. Torn, dirty clothes, grime-smeared, whiskery face.

The drunk pushed himself off the wall and made his unsteady way along the pavement, out of sight.

Tony focused the glasses on the window of the room occupied by the Arab and the Corsican. The sooty venetian blinds were down. Apparently, they'd both gone to sleep.

Methodically, Tony used the binoculars on every window within range. Then the roof tops. Finally, the dark mouths of alleys and shadowed doorways. If anyone else had the area staked out, they were being goddamn cagey about it. He couldn't spot them, not yet.

He put the field glasses back down beside the .38 and continued to wait.

You couldn't bring in a shipment this big without rumors of its expected arrival reaching the law. There were too many hungry addicts crawling the city, whining about their short supply, and too many pushers assuring them that their hunger would soon be appeased. Less than a year ago a shipment almost this big had been grabbed along with the men making the transfer by a bunch of metropolitan and federal narcs lying in wait at the drop point. But if the law was onto this shipment, they'd have an army of cops around the area. Sooner or later there was bound to be some sign of their presence. They might get the stuff, which would mean an enormous financial loss; but at least this time there wouldn't be any arrests.

And if someone was watching who was not the law . . .

The door of the bedroom opened. Frank Regalbuto came out and stretched with sleepy contentment. He wore slacks; his feet and torso were bare. He had as much Sicilian blood in him as Tony, but he didn't look anything like him. He was tall and athletically slender. His eyes were dark blue in a lean, freckled face, and his hair was sandy colored. On occasion his temper could flare, but usually he was relaxed and easy-going.

He shut the bedroom door and went to the tiny open kitchenette, turned on the tap.

Tony Fargo said, "Lock the door. I don't want her coming out here."

"She passed out," Frank told him with a mixture of bravado and sheepishness. "When I screw 'em, baby, they sleep like the dead. So don't worry about her."

"I do worry about her. For the son of a Don, you sure act stupid sometimes."

Frank grinned. It wasn't that he was afraid of him; Tony knew that. He just wasn't offended.

"I guess I'm just not a chip off the old *capo*," he said goodnaturedly. He half filled a pan with water and put it on the hotplate to boil. "Anything doing out there?"

"They showed. They're sacked out in the hotel now."

Frank came over to the window and looked down at the parking lot. "Which one is it?"

"The station wagon. Next to the red Firebird."

Frank studied it for a moment, then scanned the area.

"No sign we're in trouble?"

Tony thought briefly about the skid-row drunk.

"I don't think so. Not yet, anyway."

TWO

FRANK went back to the kitchenette and dumped a couple spoonfuls of instant coffee in a big cup. "Want some?"

"No. I'm gonna catch some sleep." Tony picked up the rifle and rose to his feet. "Your turn to keep watch." He leaned the rifle against the wall next to the window. "Wake me if you spot anything funky. If you don't, let me go till ten."

Frank Regalbuto nodded. The water was almost boiling. He poured it in the cup, added two heaping spoons of sugar, and carried it over to the table with the binoculars and Tony's .38.

His jacket was on the sofa. He got his own Police Positive .38 from the pocket as Tony went to the bedroom door.

Tony hesitated with his hand on the knob. "Stay awake."

Frank looked at him and shook his head with a slight smile. "*Antonio mio,* stop acting like I'm a complete jerk. I've got a few brains."

"I hope so, Frankie," Tony said. "I sure hope so."

He went into the bedroom and shut the door. The bedroom was furnished cheaply and frilly. The bed was big, but the girl's out-flung arms and legs took up most of it. She was sprawled on her back, sound asleep, a look of sodden contentment on her face. She was very young. Her full breasts still stood up firm, the tiny pink nipples pointing at opposite corners of the ceiling. The hair of her head was blond, but the patch between her thighs was not.

The key was in the door. Tony locked it, slipped the key in his pocket. Then he stripped, folding his things neatly on a chair. Going to the bed, he pushed the girl's

left arm and leg to make room for himself. She rolled over on her side but did not come to. She began to snore softly.

Again he felt a twinge of envy for Frankie Regalbuto.

Turning off the small bedside lamp, he climbed onto the bed and stretched out on his stomach. He wiped his mind clear.

In seconds he was asleep.

When he came suddenly awake, strong morning sunlight was flooding in through the windows. He turned his head quickly and saw what had wakened him. The girl had gotten off the bed and was padding naked around it to the door.

"Hold it!" he growled and sat up, swinging his legs off the bed.

She stopped and turned from the door, startled. "Jesus—"

"You're supposed to stick to this room. You know that."

"I need some coffee, damnit. For chrissake, what're you so jittery about? What's going on out there, anyway?"

"You sure you want to know?" he asked her softly.

She looked at his eyes and suppressed a shiver. "No. I . . . I just want some coffee is all. My mouth tastes terrible."

Tony Fargo glanced at his watch. It was twenty minutes to ten. No sense going back to sleep. "Sit down, I'll get it for you."

She slumped onto the padded stool in front of the makeup table and watched him get up and go to his clothes.

"My God, you look strong."

"I am strong." He sat down and started to pull on his socks.

She looked between his thighs and giggled. "Not as strong as Frankie."

He felt his face get hot. Under ordinary circumstances he would have slapped her across the room. But these weren't ordinary circumstances.

"You just don't do anything to me," he said between his teeth. "I'm a fag."

"Oh." She looked sympathetic, taking him seriously. "I'm sorry."

Her stupidity made him feel better. "Why? My boyfriends like it."

He stood up and pulled on his undershorts and trousers, slid his arms into the sleeves of the sports shirt. Getting the key from his pocket, he unlocked the door.

"Stay put," he told her and went out, closing the door.

Frank Regalbuto was slumped in the armchair with his bare feet up on the window sill. He turned his head and looked at Tony. In spite of his all-night vigil he was still clear eyed.

"Have a good sleep?"

"Okay." Tony walked to the window. "Anything?"

"Uh-uh. If there's a stakeout, it's the coolest one I ever saw."

Tony studied the parking lot and street. There were the normal number of cars and pedestrians. He studied the surrounding buildings, rooftops, alleys. Nothing. He picked up the field glasses and focused on the hotel room occupied by the Arab and the Corsican.

The venetian blinds were still down, but the slats had been opened. Tony could make out the vague figure of one of them, looking out.

He put down the binoculars and went to the sofa, began tugging on his loafers. "I'm going out for a walk."

"Okay." Frank stood up, stretched, groaned. "My back's stiff." He did some straight-kneed bendovers. On the third one he managed to touch his toes.

Tony Fargo got his Colt Cobra and stuck it in the waistband of his slacks. Putting on his jacket, he fastened one button to hide the gun.

"The whore wants coffee."

"Me, too." Frank went to the sink and turned on the tap.

"Make her drink it in there," Tony warned him as he went to the door. "Don't let her come out here."

Frank sighed. "I'm beginning to get your message."

"It's about time," Tony growled and went out.

The stairs were narrow and covered with badly worn linoleum. The whole house had that mixed smell of cooking and garbage that pleasantly reminded him of his childhood. None of the doors on the way down were open. The hall at the bottom reached from the entrance to a rear door. Tony made his way around some big open trash cans and went out the back.

There were a couple kids playing in the alley. Nobody else. He went the length of the alley out to the pavement. For a time he stood there, squinting into the sunlight and looking around. Pedestrians hurried past. No one was strolling; no one was loitering. The street was choked with heavy traffic. Tony looked for men sitting in parked cars. There were none.

Crossing the street, he went into a candy store and asked for a pack of cigarettes. There was only one other customer, a fat old lady thumbing through comic books. He paid for the cigarettes and went out, headed for the street alongside the parking lot.

Reaching it, he paused to light a cigarette. He took his time about it, his squinted eyes covering every building, each parked car. Then he strolled the length of the block.

There was a diner on the other corner. He went in and ordered orange juice, coffee, and a Danish. Gulping the juice, he studied the others at the counter in the mirror behind it. None of them smelled of cop. Truck drivers, mostly. Of course, some of them could be cops. But Tony didn't think so. They were all eating too fast, in a hurry to be on their way.

Sipping coffee, Tony turned on his stool and ate the Danish while he looked out the big plate-glass window. His attention was caught by a car coming down the street. Much too slowly. But the driver was the only one in it. As Tony watched, the car pulled into a parking space. The driver jumped out, glanced at his watch, strode away. Tony turned back to the counter and finished his coffee.

Outside he strolled around the block to the entrance of

the Armitage Hotel. He went into the small lobby. The desk clerk was reading a newspaper and did not look up. An elderly couple were on the sofa against the wall, consulting a city map. A porter was mopping the floor. Nobody else. Tony went out.

His route was a rough circle, taking in four blocks around the parking lot. A couple times he cut through alleys. Once he climbed a fire escape and scanned the area from a roof. Finally he went back to the diner.

"Two hamburgers to go. Rare."

He paid for them and carried them out in a brown paper bag, crossing the street to the brownstone. This time he used the front door.

Frankie Regalbuto was standing by the window when Tony came in. He turned quickly, his dark blue eyes asking the question.

"It's all ours." Tony put the bag on the table and took out one of the hamburgers.

"You're sure?"

Tony just looked at him.

Frank's shoulders relaxed a bit. Now that the time had come to move, he was getting keyed up. "That's it then." He picked up the phone and dialed the Armitage Hotel.

"Room forty-two."

Tony took a big bite of his hamburger, got a container of milk from the refrigerator, and poured some in a glass.

Frank listened to the hotel switchboard ringing. Someone in room forty-two picked up the phone but didn't say anything. There was only the sound of breathing.

"This is a beautiful day for children," Frank said in Italian, feeling a little foolish.

"Yes," the Corsican answered, also in Italian, "the birds are singing."

Credentials having been established on both sides, Frank said, "No trouble. None at all. We can meet in ten minutes."

"Good," the Corsican said and hung up.

Frank put down the phone and began wolfing the other hamburger. Tony finished off his, washed it down with

milk, and went to the rifle. He dismantled it with smooth swiftness, put the parts along with the binoculars in a canvas bag that already contained a pair of weighing scales. Zipping the bag shut, he went into the bedroom.

She wasn't there. The sound of the shower came from the open bathroom door. Tony went in. The green plastic curtain was drawn around the bathtub. He moved to the toilet and urinated. The girl opened the shower curtain a little and looked out at him. He zipped his fly and turned to her.

"We're going now. Be smart and don't go out to the other room for an hour. An hour, understand?"

She looked at his eyes and nodded quickly. "Yes."

He saw by her face that she did.

Going out to the living room, he shut the door. Frank was putting on his jacket. Not buttoning it, he dropped his .38 into the right-hand pocket. The bulge was not too noticeable, unless you were looking for it.

Tony Fargo picked up the canvas bag with his left hand and went out. Frank Regalbuto hefted the big, heavy leather suitcase and followed him.

The Arab and the Corsican were already there when Tony and Frank entered the parking lot. The Arab had unlocked the doors and was leaning in the front, opening the steering wheel lock. The Corsican stood beside the station wagon with the raincoat hanging over his right forearm, hiding his hand. Tony hooked his right thumb on the button of his jacket, so his fingers were touching the gun concealed under it.

The Arab straightened as they reached the station wagon. He looked at them nervously.

Frank's smile was a tight one. "You were right, the birds are singing."

The Arab relaxed a bit.

The Corsican did not. He and Tony Fargo were looking at each other. They had never met before, but there was a spark of recognition between them. Two professional executioners, sizing each other up.

The Arab looked greedily at the suitcase, went to the

back of the station wagon, and opened it. Frank shoved the suitcase inside. Tony put the canvas bag in with it, using his left hand, keeping his right thumb hooked on his jacket button.

Frank got in behind the steering wheel, and the Corsican climbed into the back seat. The Arab closed the rear of the station wagon and started to get in with the Corsican. Tony stopped him with his left hand.

"No. Get in front."

The Arab nodded and quickly obeyed. Tony got in the back seat and shut his door. He unbuttoned his jacket and put his right hand flat against his middle, just above the butt of the .38. Beside him the Corsican sat with both hands and the Luger concealed under the raincoat on his lap. He smiled thinly at Tony, who did not smile back. Tony's brown eyes looked at him unblinkingly; businesslike.

Frank drove away from the parking lot and headed out of the city.

It took over an hour to get there. They went out through suburbs and onto the interstate highway that stretched beyond into the farmlands. Cutting off the highway, they followed a series of back-country roads. From time to time either the Corsican or Tony Fargo looked behind them. They were not being followed.

Frank finally turned into a dirt path. There were no signs of recent tire tracks on it. He pulled to a stop in the overgrown yard of an abandoned farm, beside a sagging, weather-beaten barn.

Tony and the Corsican got out first, looking around. It appeared that nobody had been here in years. Tony drew the .38 from the waistband of his slacks and went with the Corsican through the open door of the barn.

There was plenty of light inside, coming through big gaps in the walls. They poked into corners. The place was empty. Tony climbed the ladder to the loft and had a look.

"Nobody here," he said and climbed back down. They went out and signaled the all-clear.

Frank drove the station wagon into the barn. Tony and the Corsican stepped inside and watched as the Arab opened the back of the wagon. Frank came around, pulled out the suitcase and canvas bag, and put them on the ground.

The Arab pulled at a latch of the section the luggage had been lying on. In other station wagons this section opened up into a third seat. But this one opened to reveal a big, specially built storage section.

It was crammed with plastic bags filled with white powder.

Frank looked at Tony Fargo and smiled tightly. Tony stuck the .38 back in the waistband of his slacks but kept his hand near it and his eyes on the Corsican.

Frank picked up one of the plastic bags, opened it, and dipped in a finger. He touched the tip of his finger to his tongue and nodded. The taste was just right. Closing the plastic bag, he dumped it back with the others, then reached in deep, and brought out another bag from the bottom. This one tasted right, too.

Satisfied, he crouched and opened the canvas bag, took out the scales. He put a cylindrical weight on one scale, got out a small spiral notebook and ballpoint pen.

The Corsican said, "It's time to count the money."

Frank got a small key from his pocket and gave it to the Arab, who crouched down over the big leather suitcase and unlocked it. At first, when he opened it, he could only stare at all the neatly stacked United States currency packed inside. Then he began to count it carefully.

There was supposed to be four hundred thousand dollars in the suitcase, collected from Don Paolo Regalbuto and various members of his Mafia family.

There was supposed to be thirty kilograms of raw heroin in the plastic bags.

This represented an enormous profit for the Arab and the Corsican. It was an even greater bargain for the Regalbuto family investors.

A Syrian-Lebanese smuggling gang had paid Turkish poppy growers the equivalent of ten thousand, two

hundred dollars for the three hundred pounds of opium stock. From that they had boiled the thirty pounds of morphine stock they sold in Beirut.

The Arab and the Corsican had paid the smugglers twenty-two thousand dollars for it. The cost of having the morphine base chemically processed into heroin, plus transportation, brought their total investment to thirty-five thousand dollars. Which gave them a joint profit, for this one trip, of more than three hundred thousand dollars.

Once the Regalbuto family had the raw heroin diluted with baby powder and supplied to the pushers, the heroin in the station wagon would bring in at retail prices, from the addicts themselves, almost twelve million dollars.

While the Arab counted the money, Frank put the first bag of white powder on the scale.

It balanced perfectly.

He made a mark in his notebook, took the bag off the scale, and got another from the station wagon's secret compartment. He started to weigh it.

A harsh, edgy voice sounded behind them. "Freeze! Spread your arms wide away from you! Anybody does *anything* else'll be dead before he gets a chance to know how stupid he was!"

THREE

TONY Fargo spread his hands far away from his body and turned his head carefully to look back over his shoulder.

The man inside the doorway behind him was holding a submachinegun like he knew how to use it. The other three who came in past the first one and fanned out away from him had revolvers.

They were different shapes and sizes. But all of them

had sheer nylon stockings pulled down tight over their faces, flattening and distorting their features beyond recognition.

The Corsican spread his arms out without looking behind him. Frank turned from the scales and looked full at the four gunmen before he rose slowly to his feet and obeyed the order. The Arab stayed hunched over the money in the suitcase but stretched his thin arms wide to either side of him.

"That's very nice for starters," the one with the machine-gun growled. "You with the raincoat, drop it."

The Corsican didn't seem to understand. Frank repeated the order to him in Italian. The Corsican let the raincoat slide off his hand and drop. It fell to the soft earth, still concealing the Luger under it.

"Now get your arms up over your heads. High. Reach as far as you can."

Above them Tony Fargo's brother Vincent crawled to the edge of the loft and took aim with his pump-action, heavy-duty shotgun.

"I *told* you!" the gunman to the left of the leader was exulting. "This way we get the shit *and* the dough."

Vince Fargo squeezed the trigger. The shotgun boomed, the recoil slamming hard into his shoulder. He was pumping the next shell in place as the concentrated load of steel shot slammed into the machinegunner's back, smashing through bone and flesh. The force of it hurled him across the barn. He flopped to the ground like a big broken puppet.

The shotgun boomed again as the other three whirled to fire upward. It ripped the legs out from under the second highjacker, dropping him with a shriek of agony.

Tony Fargo was spinning around, whipping the .38 from his waistband. It roared and bucked in his fist, twice in rapid succession. The first slug slashed a highjacker's side, twisting him around. The second went into his mouth with pieces of broken tooth and came out the top of his head with a segment of skull.

The Corsican was only a split-second behind him. He

hit the ground on one shoulder, rolling as he snatched the Luger from under the raincoat, firing in the same motion. The bullet got the fourth man in the eye, taking the eye with it into the brain.

The one with the smashed legs was trying to drag himself to his fallen revolver. Tony and the Corsican shot him at the same time. Both bullets hammered into the side of his head. His face hit the dirt, and he didn't move again. There wasn't much left of the side of his head. Just a pulpy mass of blood, brains, and skull fragments.

The sudden silence was acute. The odor of gunpowder fumes was like acid in the nostrils of the living.

It was all over.

Frank Regalbuto found himself holding a gun he hadn't had a chance to use.

The Arab leaned forward on his knees, turning his face carefully away from the suitcase full of money and vomiting everything he'd had to eat in the past two days.

Vince Fargo started climbing down the ladder from the loft, carrying the shotgun. He was five years older than his brother, but he looked fifteen years older. He had gray hair, a bald spot, a twenty-pound cargo of fat, and three legal children.

The Corsican rose to his feet and looked from Vince to Tony, scowling, still holding the Luger ready.

Tony smiled at him with the corners of his mouth and lowered his .38 to his side but kept his finger ready on the trigger.

"Don't be foolish," he told the Corsican in Italian. "The money's yours."

The Corsican lowered the Luger a bit but not all the way. His eyes stayed wary.

Vince Fargo came off the bottom rung of the ladder and looked at the four bodies sprawled in their blood on the dirt of the barn floor. "Fucking bastards." He looked at Frank. "Tell your father he's got a leak in his organization somewhere."

Frank Regalbuto nodded solemnly. "That's for sure."

Frank pulled the stockings off the dead men's faces, one by one. "Anybody know 'em?"

Tony and Vince shook their heads.

"Got to be tourists," Vince said.

Frank got a wallet from inside one of their jackets. He looked at the driver's license inside. "New York."

"Like I said, tourists. Bastards!"

Frank got a driver's license from each of the bodies. He copied their names down in his notebook. "Might help in finding out where our leak is."

Tony looked at him with a touch of new respect, surprised.

"I'll get the car," Vince said. He left the barn and trudged toward a tangle of trees and bushes half a mile behind it.

The Arab wiped his mouth with his sleeve and began recounting the money in the suitcase, starting from the beginning again. Frank resumed his weighing of the plastic bags of powder.

By the time Vince drove back to the barn in a new green Mustang, they were finished. The Arab was shutting the suitcase, and Frank was dumping the bags back in the hidden compartment.

The tally had been correct on both sides. Thirty kilos of raw heroin; four hundred thousand dollars.

"The car's yours," Frank told the Arab and the Corsican. "A bonus from Don Paolo."

Without thanks the two men who had executed their own transportation contract, increasing the profit on both sides, carried the suitcase out to the car.

As the sound of the car faded, Frank closed the secret compartment and locked the rear door of the station wagon.

"Okay," Vince said, "let's get this boat in its hole."

Frank looked at the corpses. "What about them?"

"Don't worry about those shits," Vince told him. "That's our end. Later."

Tony nodded. "We're still on convoy duty for you."

He looked at his brother. There was no need for them to work it out in words. After dark they'd come back here with a cement mixer truck from the Fargo Brothers Construction Company. By morning, the four dead highjackers would be part of the foundations of the new Bristol Motel.

Frank got in behind the wheel. Tony took the seat beside him. Vince climbed in back with his shotgun.

An hour later they pulled into Bill Ryan's Garage and Auto Repair. Two Regalbuto family *soldati* waiting just inside closed the heavy metal drop door behind the station wagon. A light went on inside the garage, and three more soldiers emerged from the shadows in the corners.

Frank was climbing out of the station wagon when he saw his uncle, Vito Riccobono, coming toward him from the rear of the place. Frank started to grin in triumph.

Then he saw the tears in his uncle's eyes.

"Frank . . . your father . . ." The words choked in Vito's throat.

"Spit it out, damnit!" But Frank already guessed.

"The Don is dead."

FOUR

DON ANGELO DiMorra stood at the graveside of his dead friend and with hot, unashamed tears running down his lean cheeks, listened to the priest's final eulogy.

He had warned Paolo that he was too fat. The doctors had warned him, too.

But Don Paolo Regalbuto had enjoyed the small vices too much to heed the warnings. He had continued to stuff himself with pasta drowned in rich sauces, to drink his

daily quota of two or three bottles of heavy red wine, to smoke those big cigars one after another, to overexert himself with young girls. And he had died climbing the stairs of his house at the age of sixty-four.

Angelo DiMorra reflected that he was not much younger. Fifty-nine. But he was in much better shape than Paolo had been. He had a sensible regard for his health. At forty he had given up the pastas, sauces, and sweets. It had not been difficult. His self-control and willpower were well known. He drank in moderation, a little Scotch with a liberal amount of water before dinner. He didn't smoke. His wife was no longer interested in sex, and DiMorra infrequently used young girls just to prove his manhood. He took a long brisk walk every morning before breakfast and again at night.

All this kept him lean and fit, vigorous in mind and body. He had always been a handsome man, and the years had only mellowed his good looks. His hair was gray, but he still had most of it. He was sometimes mistaken for a middle-aging movie star.

But in spite of this the death of his old friend made Angelo DiMorra remember that he, too, did not have too many years left to him. He was surprised to find himself wondering idly if those years could hold anything more for him than just conducting his business. And looking forward at the end to a large, expensive funeral.

The funeral of Don Paolo Regalbuto had been the largest in the memory of the city. The masses of flowers sent in final tribute to the dead leader required eleven special funeral wagons. The limousines and cars carrying the mourners from the funeral parlor to the cathedral and on to the cemetery tied up traffic for dozens of blocks.

The mourners were members, and relatives of the members, of the three families that ruled the city's underworld. There were also dignitaries sent to pay the last respects of other Mafia families all across the country; and a number of civilians, ordinary citizens beholden to the deceased Don, come to give homage.

None of the political figures or big businessmen who

had owed Don Paolo allegiance put in an appearance. There were too many law men and newsmen around for that. City police on hand to redirect traffic around the funeral entourage and maintain order, if necessary. Federal detectives openly taking photos and jotting down the names of everyone attending the funeral. Newsmen from the papers and television, reporting the mammoth event, kept at a respectable distance by angry-eyed *soldati.*

Don Paolo Regalbuto was being buried between the graves of his daughter, who had been born dead, and his two oldest sons, killed in the early wars for control of the city. Angelo DiMorra stood at the graveside with the closest kin: Paolo's widow, brother-in-law, and surviving son. He was sure his own grief was even deeper than theirs. After all, he had known Paolo longer than they had.

Angelo and Paolo had come to the city decades ago as young men, together with a third Sicilian who had Americanized his name to Jimmy Bruno. The three of them had fought and plotted their way to control of the city's organized underworld together. Each of them had lost people close to them in the wars with the Irish and Jewish gangs: Paolo, his two oldest sons; Angelo DiMorra, three nephews and a cousin; Jimmy Bruno (who never married), the uncle who had paid his passage to America. But finally the greater cohesiveness of the Sicilians, their ingrained loyalty to family, and the discipline of Mafia tradition, had won out. They had capped their triumph ten years later by subjugating the Neapolitans, absorbing those who were reasonable into their own operations.

Regalbuto had become the top power. DiMorra and Bruno became lesser dons with their own spheres of influence and their own businesses slightly under the protection and direction of Regalbuto.

With the death of Regalbuto, Angelo DiMorra and Jimmy Bruno were the most powerful Mafia figures left in the city. But Bruno was currently in a Federal prison on a tax rap with six months left to serve. Which made DiMorra the *numero uno,* at least for the next six months.

DiMorra turned his head slightly to look at Frank Regalbuto standing with his mother. He was pleased to see that Frankie was sobbing. A good, loving son. DiMorra wished that he had a son to cry for him like this when he died. It was his misfortune to have only daughters.

But though Frank was a good son, he was not a strong one. At least, he had never shown the strength required to inherit the power of his father. He lacked the maturity and force of personality.

Which meant that the Regalbuto forces, power, connections, and legal and illegal businesses were now up for grabs.

Angelo DiMorra was an old *mustachio,* a *Mafioso* of the ancient tradition of quiet humility and deadly patience. He was renowned for his ability to strike at exactly the right moment.

At this moment he could, if he moved swiftly and ruthlessly, seize total power.

But Jimmy Bruno was his friend since boyhood. So DiMorra was content to wait and see what developed.

He was aware that there would be some within the organization who would not be content to wait. Young Turks, hungry for power. At this very moment they would be considering their chances of defying him and the absent Bruno and of seizing control of the temporarily leaderless Regalbuto family.

DiMorra would keep himself alert, ready to deal with such foolish young men the instant they showed their hand.

The priest was still intoning the final words in Latin.

DiMorra looked across the waiting grave at Louis Orlando, a tall, slim, scholarly looking man known as The Accountant. At forty he was Jimmy Bruno's *consiglieri,* his chief adviser. With his *capo* in prison, Orlando was serving as acting boss of the Bruno family's operations. So far The Accountant had done an excellent job. But DiMorra neither liked nor trusted him. He was too cold and dry in personality and given to perversions.

Beside The Accountant stood his wife Marie, dressed in a black outfit that was far too chic in this gathering. DiMorra liked her even less than her husband, and she was one of the reasons for his distrust of Orlando. She was not a proper wife for a *capo Mafioso*. Marie Orlando was a well-preserved thirty-five with a strong, ripely curved body, a cruel, beautiful face, and dyed blond hair. She had started as a whore. Now she managed the most exclusive, expensive whorehouse in town. It operated in the suburbs under the guise of a motel. The fact that the Orlandos also *lived* there clearly indicated a flaw in his character. And rumors of their own afterhours practices with the girls disgusted DiMorra.

Among the mourners behind them were Vincent and Tony Fargo. DiMorra personally considered them to be the strongest possible threat. In addition to their lucrative construction business, they were the leaders of a gang that had served the dead don as enforcers and executioners. The Fargo brothers were clever and ambitious for power and wealth. And their men, though small in numbers, were a well-knit, experienced gang.

DiMorra considered them too explosive for a top command position, which required reliability with as little violence as possible. They were too colorful in their personalities and flamboyant in their exploits, drawing undesirable publicity. But they had the utter loyalty of the deadliest little *regime* in the city. And the older brother, Vincent, though he looked like a buffoon, had a mind capable of calculating moves and countermoves far ahead. And he had the brutal will of a born commander of men.

The priest had finally finished.

DiMorra's wife, who was six years his junior but looked a decade older than him, sobbed and leaned against him for support. Angelo DiMorra put one arm around her plump shoulders. His other arm went around Regalbuto's frail widow. In doing so, it came in contact with Frankie's arm, supporting his mother.

Together, they watched the magnificent coffin, contain-

ing the body of Don Paolo Regalbuto, as it was lowered into the earth.

Louis Orlando, The Accountant, left the cemetery in a sleek new white Mercedes. His wife drove. The Accountant sat beside her gazing out the windshield at the road, crowded with the vehicles of other departing mourners. His scholarly face was pinched in thought.

"We got six months to do something," Marie snapped. "If you don't figure out how to get control before Jimmy Bruno gets out, you might as well forget it."

"I'm well aware of that," he told her dryly. "*What* to do is the question. What and how. And when." Against a man like DiMorra their first false move would be their last. If they alerted him and missed their chance, he'd wipe them out as quickly and casually as stepping on an ant. "Besides, first there's the Commission meeting in Vegas in two days. To decide what's to be done about the Regalbuto family."

"What the Commission decides and what happens ain't always the same thing."

The Accountant considered that too obvious to deserve a comment.

These Commission meetings of the national leaders of the Mafia were pressure-hastened affairs, intended to avert the internal wars that so often erupted when a don, a *capo Mafioso,* died. With his death a power vacuum was created. The purpose of the Commission was to decide peacefully through negotiations and compromise who should fill that vacuum. But when the Commission decision conflicted with the realities of contending strengths, the decision usually fell by the wayside sooner or later.

The situation was: The Don is dead—long live the Don! But who the new Don would be, though sometimes settled by a Mafia Commission, often triggered a power struggle that exploded into violent warfare for the vacated position. The struggle might eventually be won by the dead Don's chief lieutenants or relatives; or by other Dons eager to add

the dead *capo's* soldiers and businesses to those they already controlled; or by the toughest of the Mafia's younger element, seizing this chance to prove they had the nerve, brains, and muscle to rise to the position of a Don.

The Accountant had secretly been nursing his own ambitions for a long time, waiting for his chance. And he knew as well as his overbearing wife that his chance was now. If he could redirect the power he exercised for the imprisoned Bruno quickly and skillfully enough, he could wind up controlling the whole city. To do so, he would have to eliminate DiMorra or destroy his power before Bruno got out. But the timing was perfect. Right now the various *regimes* of the Regalbuto Family were without one unifying leader, each segment looking around for its own way to go . . .

As though reading his thoughts, Marie said sharply, "If you're ever gonna stop shitting in your pants and *do* something, lover, now's the time. Before those Regalbuto *regimes* settle into a new groove. So stop thinking scared, baby. And let's get *at* it."

"Stop pushing, bitch," The Accountant said mildly. Marie was a hot-blooded, impetuous woman with a lot of drive. Which was the way to be, when the situation was ripe for it. And he agreed with her: the time had come to ignore the risk and wager everything.

Nevertheless, he continued to think it over carefully. Because whatever they did, DiMorra must never get even a hint where the threat was really coming from until it was too late.

Angelo DiMorra was quite aware of Orlando's ambition as he left the cemetery. He was thinking about The Accountant as he rode home in the bullet-proof black Cadillac limousine.

His wife was in the rear seat beside him. On the jumpseat facing them, watching out the windows, was Joe Lucci, his bodyguard. The limousine was being driven by one of DiMorra's sons-in-law, Johnny Tresca, a young policy banker who had also made himself something of a

reputation as a cool hand with the gun he wore under his jacket. Beside Tresca in the front seat was Ralph Negri, one of DiMorra's toughest and most trusted button men.

It was the first time in twelve years that Angelo DiMorra had moved with that much protection around him.

He was ready for any move The Accountant might make, sure of his own ability to smash it and Orlando with it. If he was wrong, if The Accountant did not try any treachery, DiMorra was quite prepared to wait until his old friend, Jimmy Bruno, got out of prison and then share the Regalbuto Family with him equally. But if The Accountant made a grab, DiMorra, in breaking him, would gain control of the whole city.

And if that happened, since he would not have instigated it, DiMorra would not feel disloyal in refusing to relinquish his newly acquired power. Bruno would have to take a back seat when he got out, accepting a lesser position under DiMorra. It would be the just penalty Bruno would have to pay for his bad judgment in leaving his power with the wrong man.

Concerning the problem of the Fargo brothers, Angelo DiMorra believed he already had found a solution. The best kind of solution, satisfying the needs of both sides. It would fulfill some of the hunger of Vincent and Tony Fargo for independent power and at the same time give DiMorra some measure of control over them.

About young Frank Regalbuto he did not give much thought.

Which was a mistake.

FIVE

THE HOUSE where the Commission met to decide on the Regalbuto Family's future was less than half a mile from the Strip with its glittering hotels and round-the-clock gambling casinos. Yet there was nothing about the house to suggest that it was in Las Vegas. It was in a new suburban tract of modest ranch houses that might have been part of the suburbs of any city in the United States. It belonged to the pit boss of one of the top Vegas casinos. Though he was acting as host, he had no part in the meeting. He officiated over the huge, delicious dinner which his wife and mother-in-law cooked for the distinguished guests. But as they finished the home-baked apple pie and coffee, he excused himself and drove off to his hotel casino to keep an alert eye on the night's play.

It was dark when the guests filed out of the house and crossed the narrow driveway to the two-car garage which their host had converted into a billiard room and den. The pool table had been pulled out of the way and extra chairs had been carried from the house to accommodate all the members of the Commission. The converted garage was soundproof, and a Mafia electronics expert had spent the entire day going over every inch of it, making sure it was not bugged. Button men took up guard stations around the garage, lounging in lawn chairs, remaining alert in spite of the lulling influence of the clean, hot night air blowing in from the desert.

The doors of the garage were shut and locked. It was comfortably airconditioned inside. The chairs had been arranged in two semicircles, facing each other. On one

side sat Angelo DiMorra, Louis (The Accountant) Orlando, Vincent Fargo, Frank Regalbuto, and his uncle, Vito Riccobono. Facing them were the members of the Commission, each a powerful Don in his own territory. There were two from New York and one each from eight other sections of the country. One of the New York Dons, Francesco Giunta, acted as chairman.

Inside the house they had spoken only of personal matters. Now they got down to business.

Vito Riccobono, who had been his brother-in-law's *consigliere*, spoke first. He placed before them the claims of his nephew to his father's Family.

"First of all, there is the point which no one can dispute. The point of blood. Frank Regalbuto is the only living son of Don Paolo. Then there is the point of resources. Frank Regalbuto is now a wealthy man in his own right. He has inherited all of his father's money and investments. It's only reasonable that he should also inherit his father's responsibilities. No matter how you examine it, the right of a Regalbuto to continue leading the Regalbuto Family cannot be denied."

"But does he *want* it?" Don Giunta put in.

Frank looked at the chairman flatly. "Damn right, I do. It belongs to me. I've been active in the Family business since I was seventeen. My father expected me to inherit."

"Be sensible, Frankie," The Accountant said mildly. "You've been active, yes. But you've never been an active *leader*. We both know you never really took it seriously enough."

"I do *now*."

"But you still lack the experience," Don Giunta said. "The right to direct so many important businesses also means you must have the ability to do so. Perhaps you do have the ability, but you can't deny that so far you haven't shown it. In time you may. But we are dealing with *now*."

Angelo DiMorra said nothing. He waited.

"It is true," Vito Riccobono said, "that my nephew lacks experience. But *I* don't. I was Don Paolo's adviser. I would be Frank's adviser. We both want this."

Still DiMorra did not speak up, because he saw that The Accountant was about to do it for him.

"Vito," The Accountant said in his friendliest manner, "we all respect you. You were a valued *consigliere* to Don Paolo. But you are not a leader of men. And that is what the various elements of the Regalbuto Family need now: strong, experienced leadership. There's only one sensible thing to do, and we all realize it: Divide the Regalbuto Family up between two *proven*, respected dons—half to Don DiMorra, the other half to Don Bruno. It is the only way to avoid trouble."

"It's one sure way to *cause* trouble," Vito Riccobono snapped. He looked to Vince Fargo. "How about you, Vince. Are you and your brother willing to shift allegiance to either Don DiMorra or Don Bruno?"

Vincent Fargo shook his head. "Neither of 'em. But not you and Frank, neither. No offense, Vito, but that's what I come here to say for me and Tony. From now on, we operate independent. Don Regalbuto just about gave us the go-ahead before he passed on."

"That's hard to believe," The Accountant said thinly. "You've got a good set-up, but it's too small—"

"Bullshit!" Vincent Fargo shifted in his chair and glowered at The Accountant. "We're ready for it. We're getting bigger all the time. We got the money, the connections, the organization. Our construction company's solid, the take from the garages is rolling in, and our stolen car resale operation's growing fast. Tony and me don't see no reason to take a back seat to anybody anymore. Or split anything with anybody. It's *ours*."

The hurt that had been in Frank Regalbuto's eyes when Vince began was gone. His jawline was taut. He spoke softly through his teeth. "I figured I could count on you and Tony to back me."

Vince raised and lowered a plump shoulder. His meaty face stayed stubbornly determined. "Sorry, kid."

"Tony and me've been like brothers."

"That's personal. I'm talking business."

Vito Riccobono leaned toward the older Fargo brother, his face red with anger. "And who *put* you in business, you bastard? Frank's father. You and Tony weren't nothing but a couple back-alley bums till he took you in."

Vince nodded, unoffended. "That you don't have to tell me. We owed Don Paolo. A lot. But Frank we don't owe. That's the way it hangs."

Angelo DiMorra decided the time had come to begin. He laced his strong, slender fingers together on his lap and turned his head slightly to look at his dead friend's son. "See how it is, Frankie? You got to figure that right now there's a lot of men that've been part of your father's family who're thinking the same way. They don't owe *you* anything. You don't have the years of building solid relationships with them. Obligations. Another thing: you don't have a track record to make 'em feel they could follow you with complete confidence, like they could with your father. And you don't have the weight behind you to *make* them stick with you, even if you wanted to try forcing it. Frankie, your father would've told you what I'm telling you: don't reach for something until you know you're strong enough to hold onto it. For your own good believe me, right now you're not ready to handle it."

Frank started to reply, but his uncle beat him to it. "And how would *you* handle it?" he demanded, keeping his eyes on DiMorra as he jerked a thumb in Vince Fargo's direction.

Angelo DiMorra appeared to consider it for a moment. He looked at Vince. "How does this sound to you? Your operation goes independent. *But* you and your boys stand ready to handle any trouble that needs your kind of handling in Jimmy Bruno's Family and mine. Any time we call on you, no questions and no arguments. In return for that we slip you all the city building contracts that come our way for a percentage."

Vince pretended to think it over, as though DiMorra hadn't worked it out with him in private before coming here. Finally, he nodded. "Sounds okay to me."

But The Accountant was scowling. "It doesn't to me."

DiMorra looked at him. "It would to Jimmy Bruno, and you're just acting for him till he gets out."

"Like you said, I'm acting for Jimmy. And I want a better deal than that for him."

"But you can't get it, not without a fight. Do you have the guns to make Vince and Tony knuckle under? No. I do, but I don't want a war. Not when we can settle it friendly like this, with all of us getting something out of it."

The chairman of the meeting, Don Francesco Giunta, spoke up. "Sounds like the answer to me. That's what we're here for, to settle things without trouble."

The other members of the Commission nodded in agreement. Vito Riccobono watched them and kept silent, understanding it was a done thing. But Frank was frowning at DiMorra. In his heart he knew the opposition was right: he was not ready to take over command of his father's Family. He didn't have enough troops loyal to him, enough experience, enough personal debts accumulated. But it felt wrong to go down without some show of fight.

"Is that what you call handling it?" he demanded. "Just give 'em what they want? Suppose everybody from my father's organization decides to go on their own? We just let them?"

DiMorra shook his head. "Nobody else goes on his own. None of them have got what it takes to make it, like Vince and Tony have." He gestured at The Accountant. "Orlando had the answer for the rest. We split them. Half to Bruno, half to me."

"Some of them *might* have other notions."

"They won't after they're told the right way. Not when they know the Fargo brothers'll be dealing with any of them that won't be reasonable." DiMorra's smile was kindly. "See how simple it is?"

"Sure," Frank said bitterly, "for you. You get everything you want: half of my father's organization."

"I want more than that," DiMorra told him. "I want *you*."

Frank Regalbuto stared at him, not sure he understood.

Angelo DiMorra leaned toward him, letting emotion come into his voice for the first time. "Frankie, I was there when you were born. Right there in the hospital, waiting with your father." He reached out and gripped Frank's knee with his hand. "I don't have a son, Frankie—and I ain't got many years left to me. I said you weren't ready to take on the responsibilities of a Don. But you could be by the time I go. By then I'd see to it you had the experience—every chance to prove you can handle it." He paused for effect. "If you do prove it, you'll inherit the whole organization from me."

He took his hand from Frank's knee and looked at the members of the Commission. "You heard me say it. You're witnesses to it."

He looked again at Frank. And waited.

It took Frank a moment to get over his surprise. He spoke slowly, warily, "If I come in with you, the drug operation comes with me—*under* me. That I can handle. I know it better than anybody in the city."

DiMorra eyed him calculatingly. "Ready to back it with your own money?"

Frank's answer was quick. "If I do, I get the profits."

"With a percentage to me."

"Not unless you invest. Match my investment, dollar for dollar—and we split the profits."

DiMorra smiled faintly, pleased by Frank's unexpected show of practicality at negotiation. "Already you're learning." He nodded. "Sounds reasonable."

Frank's sudden grin made him look boyish again. "Then it's a deal."

There were tears in Angelo DiMorra's eyes as he rose from his chair and went to Frank. He took Frank's face between his hands and kissed him.

Frank tolerated it, embarrassed. Nobody else was embarrassed. They all looked happy.

Except for The Accountant, who watched sourly. "Angelo, if you're getting Frank, I want Vito. I need him."

Vito Riccobono frowned. "Wait a minute. I want to be with Frankie."

DiMorra looked at him and shook his head. "No. Orlando's right. With Jimmy Bruno in the can, he needs another experienced head to help him."

The Accountant was startled, figuring he was getting the better man. He was quick to press his advantage. "And we're gonna want plenty to make up for you getting those drug profits. Like adding the Regalbuto prostitution set-up to Bruno's. And the freight operation and the slots. For starters."

Angelo DiMorra sat down again. He folded his hands on his lap and looked at The Accountant calmly. "Well," he said quietly, "that's what we came here to work out."

They worked it out. It took time, but they got it done. They argued and weighed and balanced, apportioning the pieces of the Regalbuto Family organization and operations with infinite care, so that though both DiMorra's Family and Bruno's Family gained in strength, their relative strengths remained the same, neither gaining more than the other.

It was three in the morning when they were finished. Weary and relieved that it was over, they started to say their goodbyes.

Frank Regalbuto rose to his feet. "Before we break up, there's one more matter for this Commission to deal with."

The quiet strength of his voice startled them. He had their full attention.

He looked to Angelo DiMorra. "Don Angelo, four men tried to highjack the last shipment of heroin purchased by my father. They were waiting at the place where we made the exchange with the importers. A place known to very few. Which means the informer was someone close to my father."

Frank took a slip of paper from his pocket. "Here are the names of the four highjackers. And the name of the man they belonged to."

DiMorra took the paper from him. Silently, he read the five names printed on it.

The chairman of the meeting stirred uneasily in his chair. "What makes this a matter that concerns us here?" he demanded.

DiMorra looked up from the slip of paper. His face was grim. "Because these men belonged to a Don from another city." He paused. "Your city." He turned his head slightly and looked at the other New York representative, Don Mariano Vassallo. "Are the first four names known to you?" he asked. Gravely, he held out the slip of paper to him.

Vassallo's face went pale with shock. DiMorra, studying him intently, decided the shock was genuine, that he had not been alerted by Frank's opening words.

Vassallo had himself under control when he took the paper. Expressionless, he read the four names printed above his own. He took longer than was necessary before raising his eyes. There was pain in them.

"I didn't know anything about this thing they did in your territory. That I swear on the blood of my mother."

DiMorra's eyes bored into his. "These men do belong to your Family?"

Vassallo nodded stiffly, unhappily. "They are part of Giuseppe Spada's *regime*."

"They *were*," Frank said thinly. "They're all dead."

Vassallo didn't look at him. His eyes remained locked with DiMorra's. Both Dons looked sad.

"Spada has been like my right arm for ten years," Vassallo said softly.

DiMorra was equally soft. "The important thing is to learn the name of the man who informed to him. Such a man has to be dealt with. I wouldn't want a traitor like that entering my family. Or Jimmy Bruno's."

Vassallo looked around him at the other faces. There was regret in some of them but no relenting.

He sighed and met DiMorra's expressionless stare again. "I'll make a phone call," he said hoarsely. "Spada will be here by tomorrow afternoon."

Angelo DiMorra rose to his feet.
"Thank you," he said formally. He turned and left.
Frankie Regalbuto went out after him.

SIX

THE GIRL climbing onto the diving board might as well have been naked, Vincent Fargo reflected, for all that the bright green bikini concealed of her slender, impudently curved, creamy-skinned body. Her face was worth looking at too; framed by dark red hair, the mouth generously full, strong cheekbones, big eyes as green as her bikini. And she was vibrant with youth.

Vince appreciated her almost academically, the way he would have appreciated a sleek new sports car. He'd gotten married when he was nineteen and never fooled around after that. His wife, a fiery little thing from Catania, had always been more than enough for him. And when the kids had come, they had added another reason for centering his life around his home. When he went out, it was for business. He took pride in doing his work professionally and building his success. But his pleasures in life were totally involved with his family.

Nevertheless, he still knew a pretty girl when he saw one. And this one was exceptional.

Her name was Ruby Dunne, and she knew what she had. It was obvious in the way she moved and held herself, displaying herself with an oddly disarming, humorous arrogance.

The diving board bounced slightly as she walked out to the end of it, making her ripe young breasts jiggle with each step. She posed saucily at the end, her hand on an

out-thrust hip, looking down at Frank Regalbuto treading water in the middle of the pool.

"Come on, don't be chicken!" Frank called to her. "The water's nice and warm!"

"Liar!" she called back. But she straightened, raising her slim arms, and went off the board with the grace of a professional diver. She knifed into the water smoothly with hardly a splash, going deep.

Vincent Fargo wiped perspiration from his meaty face with both hands and shifted slightly into the shade of a tree. He hated this Nevada climate. He had too much fat to tolerate the stifling heat. It was hard for him to breathe. Sweat poured from his armpits and down his spine, soaking his sports shirt. Even with dark glasses and the peak of his golf cap protecting his eyes, the intense glare of the sunlight made his vision blur when he exerted himself.

Ruby Dunne bobbed up to the surface beside Frank, her dark red hair gleaming wetly, her mouth opening to suck air into her lungs. Frank took her face between his hands and kissed her. She laughed and threw her arms around his neck, deliberately hanging on him and sinking them both below the surface.

Like a couple kids, Vince thought, and smiled indulgently.

They came back up to the surface, sputtering and laughing, breaking away from each other. The girl swam towards the diving end of the pool. Vince shifted position again to come into Frank's line of vision. Frank spotted him and changed direction, cutting through the water to the side of the pool.

He climbed out, water dripping off his hard lean body. "Hi, Vince. What time is it?"

"Two P.M. Spada's plane lands in two hours. We're supposed to be out there to meet him. You and me."

"Okay. The Don up yet?"

Vince nodded. "Having breakfast in his rooms." He looked toward where Ruby Dunne was climbing out of the pool. "Good-looking girl."

"Good-looking, hell. She's beautiful."

Ruby started to come around the pool towards them, but stopped when she saw them talking together, and stayed where she was, watching.

"Smart, too." Vince palmed more sweat off his face. "Jesus, this heat. Where'll you be in an hour and a half?"

"If I'm not in the coffee shop, you'll find me at the tables."

"Okay, I'll pick you up when it's time." Vince turned and hurried back into the hotel's airconditioning.

"Why do you want me to meet this girl?" DiMorra eyed Frank shrewdly. "Trying to impress her?"

They were in the living room of DiMorra's suite. It was the best suite in the hotel, which was only natural, considering all the points DiMorra owned in the place. He had points in other Vegas hotels, but this one was his biggest investment. DiMorra was at home here. He lounged on the modern sofa, elegant in tailored slacks and a white turtleneck, sipping coffee as he waited for Frank to answer.

Frank glanced over at DiMorra's bodyguard, Joe Lucci, slumped in a chair near the windows, immersed in a copy of *Time* magazine. One of the things Lucci was good at was being around without appearing to listen.

Frank looked back to DiMorra. "Well, that's part of the reason," he admitted. "Look, you'll like meeting her. She's a nice girl."

DiMorra let a little paternal humor creep into his eyes. "So what's she doing with *you*?"

Frank grinned in spite of himself. "Sometimes I wonder myself. All I know is, she's got me spinning."

"She must have. I wondered when I heard you'd brought this girl all the way out here with you. With all the local talent in Vegas available to go to bed with."

Frank looked embarrassed. "You want to know something funny? This is one girl I haven't *been* to bed with. I tried, naturally, but . . ."

"That doesn't sound funny to me. It sounds serious."

"You could be right. I mean, I even find myself thinking about getting married."

DiMorra laughed softly. "You don't have to look so ashamed, Frank. Marriage isn't an unnatural act, you know. And it's about time you started thinking of settling down." He looked at Frank thoughtfully. "Ruby Dunne —that a stage name?"

"No, it's her real name."

DiMorra frowned. "That's not so good. If you're really thinking about marriage, Frank, you should look for a nice Italian girl. There're plenty of them around."

"But none of them that turn me on like Ruby does."

"That ain't all that matters. Maybe I sound like a square, but it's true."

Frank tried to be diplomatic. "Well, you're from the old country, so it's natural for you to feel that way. But I was born here. I'm an American, and so is she."

DiMorra nodded. "That's so. But you're both also something else—Italian and Irish. For the long haul, believe me, it's better to stick to your own. They're the only ones you can depend on all the way."

Frank's mouth got a stubborn set to it. "I can't change what I feel. Or who I feel it for."

DiMorra studied him, then put down his cup, and stood up. He got a blue sports coat from the closet. It fitted his lean figure beautifully. He gestured toward the door with a twist of his handsome gray head. "Come on. I think I would like to meet this girl."

The three of them sat in an isolated booth in the rear of the hotel's coffee shop: DiMorra, Frank, and Ruby Dunne. Joe Lucci sat at a nearby table, sipping coffee and watching the entrance, ready to fend off anybody who recognized the Don and tried to come over to introduce himself. Lucci knew he wouldn't be called on to do bodyguard duty of a more serious nature. Not here in Vegas.

Las Vegas was a "safe city." Anyone who made trouble or created violence here automatically put himself beyond

the pale, incurring the vengeful wrath of the entire organization.

Ruby found herself unexpectedly shy and slightly flustered by Angelo DiMorra's presence. It wasn't only that he was much more handsome than she'd expected. He radiated the quiet sureness of a man utterly in control of his world. There was a power and authority to him she'd never felt from anyone else. But there was kindness there, too; in his voice and his eyes. That he could be ruthless she knew from his reputation. She hadn't expected the warmth that was also a part of him.

"Look," she told him, "please don't be annoyed with Frank for nagging you into meeting me. It's my fault. I pestered him into it."

"Why?"

Ruby decided to be frank. She couldn't be anything else with this man. "I want to make records. So far, no luck. I figured, when I talk to people in the record companies, it might help if I could say I know you."

"Possibly." DiMorra liked her honesty. And the dignity of her manners. She had an underplayed kind of class. Obviously, well brought up.

"I've been trying to help," Frank said. "But all I've been able to swing for her so far has been a couple club dates back home."

"Which was great, as far as they went." Ruby put her hand on Frank's and smiled to let him know she still appreciated it. She looked back to DiMorra. "But for a singer that's not where it's at. You've got to break into records, shoot for a hit. *Then* the big club dates come by themselves. That's why I asked Frank to bring me along when he said he was taking a few days holiday out here. Hoping to meet the kind of men who can help."

"You're an ambitious girl," DiMorra observed.

"I want to succeed. To *be* somebody."

"Does your family approve of your career?"

"I don't have any family anymore. My mother died three years ago."

"I'm sorry." DiMorra gave her a look of genuine sympathy. "And your father?"

She hesitated, looking down. Then she raised her head and looked into his eyes, almost defiantly. "I don't have a father. I never knew who he was."

She said it matter-of-factly, but there was something in her eyes and voice that reached to DiMorra's heart. He had known many pretty, ambitious young girls, but this was a strange one. In some ways she seemed more mature than her years, yet there was also something almost child-like about her—vulnerable, in need of protection.

"Are you a good singer?" he asked after a moment.

Frank answered for her, "Beautiful. A really lovely voice. Sex appeal and class."

DiMorra glanced at Frank, then looked back to Ruby, waiting.

"I think I'm good, yes." She said it quietly, carefully.

DiMorra started to say something, then stopped himself. He was looking toward the entrance to the coffee shop.

Frank looked in the same direction and saw Vincent Fargo standing there, nodding at him. He got out of the booth, looked down at Ruby.

"Sorry, honey, I got some business to take care of for a couple hours." He looked uncertainly at DiMorra.

"Go ahead, Frank," DiMorra told him. "Don't worry. I'll take care of your little girl."

"Thanks." Frank hurried past Lucci.

When Frank and Vincent Fargo were gone, Ruby turned back to DiMorra. "I cut a couple records at my own expense. They're not the best quality mechanically. But if you really want to know if I can sing . . ."

"There's a record player in my suite," he said and got out of the booth, holding out a hand to help her to her feet.

The airconditioned Cadillac churned up a trail of dust as it purred along the road through the desert. Las Vegas

was more than ten miles behind it. There wasn't another car in sight. Not a house or any other sign of life.

Don Mariano Vassallo sat in the front seat beside his son, who was driving. Giuseppe Spada sat in the back between Vince Fargo and Frank Regalbuto. Spada was a short, squat man in his fifties. In spite of the cold inside the Cadillac his face was red with heat. His plump hands trembled on his knees.

He had been living in terror ever since those four men he had sent out hadn't returned. He hadn't been able to sleep, waiting for the ax to fall. But when days had passed without anything happening, he'd begun to relax. When Don Vassallo had phoned from Vegas, saying he had trouble and needed his help, Spada became even more convinced that no one had traced the highjack try to him.

But as soon as he saw who was in the car waiting for him at the airport, he'd known he was a dead man.

"Don Mariano," he pleaded, "I swear to you I didn't have anything to do with it. They were my men, it's true. But they were acting on their own. I knew nothing about it. I swear this to you!"

Vassallo didn't bother to answer. He didn't even turn his head to look at him.

Spada tried again, his voice weak and choked with emotion. "I been faithful to you all these years! I even saved your life twelve years ago! Remember?"

"I remember," Vassallo said tonelessly. He still wouldn't turn his head.

Vassallo's son pulled off the road onto a dirt path winding between barren hills. The sun struck harsh glints off the metal of the car. The wheels churned up a continuous cloud of dust and sand.

The Cadillac came to a stop between two low sandy hills. Frank opened the door on his side and got out, taking a gun from his pocket.

Vince shoved Spada. "Out."

Spada clutched at the shoulder of Vassallo's jacket desperately. "Please listen to me!"

Vassallo turned his head at last and looked at his old friend, his trusted lieutenant. His face was sad. "You're going to die, Giuseppe. Tell them what they want to know. Tell them who their traitor is, so you can die quickly and without pain. Decently, like a man should die."

"But I didn't do anything!" Spada bleated.

Vince clubbed him across the ear with the side of his fist, knocking him loose. Spada fell halfway out of the car. Frank grabbed his shirt with his free hand and yanked him the rest of the way out, letting him sprawl dazed in the loose sand. Vince climbed out after him. Vassallo's son got out of the front seat.

"Shut the damn doors!" Vassallo snapped. "I can't stand that fucking heat."

His son shut the car doors. Vassallo remained inside with the airconditioning, lighting a cigar. Outside the heat of the flaming desert sun struck down at the men like a heavy, malevolent beast of prey.

Vassallo's son unlocked the trunk of the Cadillac. Vince reached in and drew out a baseball bat. When Spada saw it, he scrambled to his feet and tried to run, not giving a damn about the gun in Frank's hand.

Frank slapped him across the face with it, ripping flesh from Spada's cheekbone and spinning him back toward Vince. Spada tumbled, spreading his legs wide apart to catch his balance. Vince whipped the bat up from the ground, slapping it into Spada's crotch.

Spada howled like an animal. He fell in the sand doubling up and clutching at himself.

"Who's our informer?" Frank asked him.

Nothing came out of Spada but a continuous, bubbling moan.

Vince raised the bat high over his head and whipped it straight down, smashing one of Spada's knees apart.

Frank winced at the sharp sound of the bones snapping. Spada's scream knifed through his eardrums.

That was the thing about Vegas. You didn't have to go far out of it to find a place where you could get it done in privacy. Screaming like that could be heard a mile away.

"Tell 'em," Vassallo's son advised Spada. "Tell 'em and get it over with."

Spada, locked in his world of agony, didn't seem to hear.

Vincent Fargo swung the bat in a long arc, smashing a shoulder.

Inside the airconditioned Cadillac, Vassallo smoked his cigar and stared straight ahead through the windshield, his face unreadable.

Angelo DiMorra sat in the living room of his suite, listening to Ruby Dunne's last number coming through the stereo speakers. Ruby stood against the wall. Listening to herself. Watching him.

When the record finished, he continued to sit motionless for a while, leaning forward with his arms on his knees, staring at the carpet. Then he raised his head and looked at her approvingly.

"I like your voice."

"Thanks . . ." She hesitated, then grinned, and said it. "But do you know enough about singing to judge?"

DiMorra smiled at her. "Of course. I'm Italian, ain't I?" He liked the way she laughed. "I'm not a professional, of course. But I know some men who are. Would you mind if I get them to listen to these?"

"Mind? I'd be very grateful." As he got up and went behind the bar she added, "But warn them. Like I told you, the technical quality on these isn't too good."

He nodded as he put two glasses on the bar. "I'll explain that. What do you drink?"

She started to refuse. "It's a little early . . . Oh, what the hell, why not? A little Scotch, a lot of water."

She went over to the bar and sat on one of the leather stools, watching him mix. "You know, Mr. DiMorra, I really do appreciate your going to the trouble for me. I know how busy you are."

He looked at her. There was something in the look she recognized and quickened to. "You don't have to call me

Mr. DiMorra. I'm an old man, but I don't always like being reminded. Try Angelo."

She tried it, softly. "Angelo . . ."

"Better. Now tell me about yourself."

"I've already told you a lot."

"About your ambitions. Tell me about your life."

"Oh, you wouldn't want to hear my whole life story."

"Why not?"

She surprised herself. "Because some parts of it weren't too happy. Sometimes I get weepy when I think about those parts. You wouldn't like it if I suddenly broke down and started bawling on your shoulder."

He looked at her again. "You'd be surprised," he said, "if you knew how many people have cried on my shoulder over the years."

It was dark when Joe Lucci drove Angelo DiMorra out to the airport. DiMorra didn't like talking important business in the hotel. The F.B.I. was all over Vegas, putting new bugs in the rooms as fast as they were found and taken out.

The Cadillac was waiting by the side of the road just outside the airport entrance. Lucci pulled up behind it. Frank and Vince got out of the Cadillac and walked back. The Cadillac purred away as they got in the back. DiMorra turned in the front seat and looked at them.

"Bury Spada deep?"

Vince nodded. "It's easy with all that sand."

"It was Longobardo," Frank blurted, his throat tight. "Longobardo told Spada where to catch us with the dough and the drugs. I can't believe it. He used to be like an uncle to me."

DiMorra nodded gravely. "It happens. But you're right, he was a good man." DiMorra sighed. "Okay, so make the hit an easy one. Let him go out with some dignity. But I want him found. Just in case anyone else knows, let 'em see a traitor doesn't get away with it."

"Want I should go with Frank?" Vince asked him.

"No. Both of you going makes it too obvious. Your brother can help him do it. You go back with me in a couple days."

"Okay."

DiMorra looked at his watch, then at Frank. "There's a plane home in fifteen minutes. Get going. I want this cleaned up right away."

"I've got to call Ruby and—"

"There's no time," DiMorra interrupted. "Get on the plane. I'll explain you had to go somewhere suddenly; I won't say where. She can come back with me when I go home."

"You don't have to do that. Just see she gets on a plane in the morning."

"No. I've got a man from a music company in Los Angeles flying in tomorrow afternoon to listen to her records."

Frank stared at DiMorra, surprised. "That's beautiful! I'm in your debt."

"That's okay," DiMorra said. "Don't worry about it."

SEVEN

LATER they both realized they'd known what was going to happen between them that night.

They had dinner together in the small, plush, discreetly lighted gourmet restaurant of the hotel. Ruby Dunne marveled at the sense of privacy. Their table was in a corner. The three tables nearest to them remained empty. The maitre d' kept the other patrons waiting for tables, explaining that those three were reserved.

Joe Lucci dined at the same table with Ruby and DiMorra, but Ruby found herself forgetting his presence. He

had a strange knack of being there and not being there at the same time. He concentrated on his meal, drinking sparingly of the superb wine, appearing to be utterly lost in his own thoughts. He existed only as an occassionally noticed shadow that in no way inhibited their talk.

Actually, Ruby did most of the talking. She had never spoken so freely or fluidly. Every time she started to run down, DiMorra skillfully eased her into a new subject. His gentle, genuine interest was obvious, and Ruby found herself expanding in the dynamic warmth of his personality.

"You'd have made a great reporter," she told him at one point. "You know how to ask all the right questions."

DiMorra smiled, complimented.

A couple times during the meal men came over to their table. Both were so famous that the maitre d' did not try to head them off. One was a comedian with a top-rated television show. The other was a shipping tycoon whose flamboyant international operations got his picture in the newspapers with a frequency unusual for a businessman.

Both of them came over only briefly to pay their respects to Angelo DiMorra. Because she was with him, they included her in that respect. But there was more to it than that. Each looked at her and then at DiMorra, smiling and nodding their approval, allowing a tinge of envy to show. Ruby could see that DiMorra enjoyed this. As for herself she experienced a glowing sense of "being somebody" that was not diminished by knowing that their unspoken compliment grew from her being with DiMorra.

They were having coffee after the dinner when Louis (The Accountant) Orlando entered and came to their table. Ruby didn't know who he was. She sensed a tensing in DiMorra as the man approached. The way the man looked her over was approving but not as carefully respectful as it had been with the comedian and the tycoon.

The Accountant looked from her to DiMorra. "Very nice. Lovely girl." There was something about the way he said it she didn't like.

"She's a friend of Frankie's," DiMorra informed him flatly, not smiling.

"Oh." The Accountant smiled at her. She didn't like the way he smiled either. There was something dirty in it.

"What's on your mind, Louie?" DiMorra snapped, impatient with his presence.

The Accountant dropped the smile. "I want to talk over the new set-up with you. We've got to arrange it so the transition goes smoothly and quickly."

DiMorra frowned at him, considering it. Then he nodded, reluctantly accepting the necessity. "Okay, we'll take a walk." He looked at Ruby. "I'm sorry. This is business."

"That's all right," she assured him. She tried to make it cheerful but couldn't quite hide her disappointment. "I'll go in the casino and play awhile."

"You like to gamble?"

"Now and then it's fun. For twenty dollars." She laughed. "They don't get rich on me."

"What's your game?"

"Twenty-one, usually."

DiMorra nodded approvingly. "That's a nice woman's game. One thing I don't like to see is ladies at the craps tables. They stop being ladies."

He took a bill from his pocket and put it in her hand. "Don't stay up too late. Remember, you want to be nice and fresh when you meet the guy from the music company tomorrow."

She looked at the bill. It was a hundred dollars. She tried to give it back to him. "I have money of my own."

He ignored her attempt, getting up from his seat. "Thanks for keeping me company. I don't like eating alone."

"I enjoyed being with you." She looked up into his eyes. "I enjoyed it very much."

The blackjack table she picked turned out to be lucky for her. She beat the dealer two out of three, hitting blackjack more often than she could remember in a single sitting. The luck exhilarated her, but she continued to bet carefully, increasing the bet only when she was winning,

going back down to her original bet each time she lost. When she was a hundred dollars ahead, she quit and cashed in her chips.

It was eleven o'clock, and she went to her room to get a full night's sleep. But she found she couldn't. Part of it was nervousness about the meeting with the music company representatives next day. But there was more to it than that.

She kept thinking about Angelo DiMorra and what she felt when she was with him: warm and safe and protected, invulnerable and complete, just because she was in his presence. An excitement she'd never known before welled up in her, making her nerve ends tingle, her breathing quicken.

Ruby looked at her watch. It was a little after midnight. She got off the bed and dressed quickly, her fingers fumbling. Her sense of reckless daring amazed her. She dismissed the thought of phoning first. A polite turndown was something she could not have handled right now.

In her bathroom she ran a brush through her hair and decided against makeup. Taking only her room key and two hundred-dollar bills, she left and took the elevator to the top floor of the hotel.

In front of his door she hesitated briefly. Her heart was thudding in her chest. She pressed the buzzer.

The door was opened by Joe Lucci, wearing slacks and a T-shirt, his feet in slippers. He looked at her without expression.

"Is Angelo asleep?" Her voice had a ragged edge to it.

"No." Lucci motioned her in without going to check first. Don Angelo was alone, and this was a beautiful girl. It was up to the Don to decide in person what he wanted to do about it.

He shut and locked the door and motioned to the right. "He's in there, watching TV." Lucci turned away and went back into his own room, shutting the door.

DiMorra, wearing a blue silk dressing robe, sat on the living room sofa with his bare feet up on the coffee table,

watching an old Western on the TV screen. He looked up at her, allowing a faint expression of surprise.

"You were going to make it an early night," he chided gently, like a father admonishing a slightly naughty child.

"I couldn't sleep." Her voice was thick. She sat down on a footstool and put the two hundred-dollar bills on the coffee table. "I got lucky. Doubled your money."

"And quit while you were ahead? Smart girl." He studied her. "Would you like a pill to help you sleep? I've got some good ones. Don't knock you out; just relax you. And you wake up clear in the morning—no grogginess."

She stared at him. Nervous excitement made her green eyes very big. "Don't you like me?"

He hesitated briefly. "Yes." He didn't pretend not to know what she meant.

Her little laugh was forced, embarrassed. "You didn't even *try* to make a pass at me. Not even to make me feel good."

"You're Frank's girlfriend."

"No, I'm not. Not like that. Just a friend. He doesn't turn me on, not that way. Not . . . like I feel with you."

"That's very flattering," he said quietly. "But, I'm not the kind of man who chases after young girls."

"No. I know that." She was having trouble drawing a deep breath. "*I'm* chasing after *you*."

She put her room key down on top of the hundreds and stood up. "May I use your bathroom a moment?"

DiMorra nodded, pointed to a doorway. When she was gone, he looked at the TV set again. He liked Westerns; liked knowing ahead of time how they would end, with the villains getting what they deserved. But he was no longer watching this one.

He was seeing Ruby Dunne, feeling the slim, taut vibrancy of her; the eager excitement in her stirring a sudden response in his guts. It was nothing like what he felt with the other young girls he had sometimes spent a pleasant hour with. DiMorra tried to analyze the difference.

He knew that Ruby Dunne's need for him was real. The

fact that the power and influence he represented was part of his attraction did not take away from it. What a man had achieved was part of what made him the man he was, as much as his looks, age, build, dress.

There were other girls who were attracted to losers. He'd met some of them in his younger days.

DiMorra wondered why he hesitated to take advantage of Ruby's desire for him. He didn't think it had anything to do with Frank Regalbuto. She wasn't Frank's wife. She was his girlfriend, which was different. If a man couldn't hold his girlfriend, that wasn't the fault of anybody else.

DiMorra decided it was that he didn't want to hurt her. She seemed so fragile, wide open to being hurt . . .

The Western had interrupted for a commercial. Ruby hadn't come back. DiMorra got to his feet and went for a look. As he'd expected, she wasn't in the bathroom. He continued through to his bedroom.

She was in his bed, a sheet drawn up to her delicately boned shoulders. Her shoes were on the floor. Her clothes were folded neatly on a chair. Her eyes watched him, half frightened, half defiant.

He walked slowly to the bed. Her eyes didn't leave his face as she lowered the sheet to her slim waist.

Her breasts were fuller than he'd expected. The small pert nipples were erect with desire. Lust flooded DiMorra with a violence that was a shock to him.

"Please . . .?" Her whisper was shaky. "Please . . ."

He sat on the bed, cupped a breast in his hand. It was heavy, yet firm and resilient. The smooth deliciousness of it sent a tingling from his fingertips through his entire nervous system.

She wound her bare arms around his neck, drawing him down to her. She was stronger than she looked. Her mouth found his hungrily, her pointy tongue darting in to flick his.

She moaned as he took her. Moaned and then cried out uncontrollably as her orgasm seized and shook her with such startling swiftness that he had to hasten his own.

And then she was clinging to him tightly, like a lost child who had finally found shelter and was afraid to lose it, her whole body trembling with release, her face wet with tears.

"Don't," he whispered, wiping at her tears with a fingertip.

"It never happened before," she sobbed. "Never, never . . . I . . . I thought I was frigid . . ."

Pride and delight filled him. He held her tenderly, stroking her smooth back soothingly. In minutes she was asleep in his arms.

He lay there looking at her. In the past he'd always fallen asleep himself, quickly. But now he didn't feel sleepy or tired. He couldn't remember having felt so alertly awake before, so alive.

In repose Ruby's face was like a baby's; soft, open, the lips parted, trusting.

He knew he should feel like a dirty old man. But he didn't. He remembered the thoughts that had troubled him during Paolo Regalbuto's funeral. The knowledge that he himself might not have many more years. And that those years held little pleasure for him.

No pleasure from his wife, certainly. His daughters—they could only give him more irritation. And he had no son to carry on for him, to give him some feeling of immortality after he was gone.

But now as he lay in his bed holding the sleeping girl, he knew that he was still a virile man; that he could still have a son. There was still time with the right woman . . .

The direction of his thoughts disturbed him. Cautiously, he extricated himself from Ruby's slim arms. She stirred but did not wake up as he got off the bed.

He went into the bathroom and took a shower. As he dried himself, he looked at his image in the mirror. What he saw excited him. He looked fifteen years younger.

Ruby was sprawled out on her stomach when he returned to the bedroom. He stood looking at the sweet tapering and flaring of her back, the graceful curving of her outflung legs. Passion coursed through him again, surpris-

ing him. It had been a long time since that had happened to him more than once in a single night.

He sat on the bed and ran his hands lightly over the softly pouting mounds of her saucy buttocks, the quickening of his desire growing instantly.

Her eyes opened. She turned her head on the pillow and looked over her shoulder at him.

"More . . ." she whispered sleepily. "Please, sir, can I have more . . .?"

She forced herself to remain face down as long as she could while his handling of her buttocks became rougher, driving her wild. Finally, she couldn't stand it any more. She twisted around, grabbing for him, panting. Her lips nibbled his chest, her teeth nipped at his belly, her tongue flicked out.

"Don't," he whispered thickly, seizing her hair and turning her face up to him.

"But I want to!" she moaned deliriously. "I love you so much . . ."

He twisted her over on her back, threw himself on her savagely.

He didn't feel at all like a dirty old man. As he enfolded and entered her young, taut, squirming nakedness, he knew he had never felt so clean in his life.

Arnaldo Longobardo felt tired when he came out of the building. He'd had to play it rough upstairs to get what the bookie owed out of him. He didn't like having to do that, but he needed the dough. Now he had it, but it still wasn't enough. He needed more, desperately. The recession had hit his legit investments, and he needed to back them up before he lost everything he'd already put into them.

If he hadn't been so desperate, he'd never have tried what he had done with Spada of New York. That was walking the edge of your own grave.

It was dark when he came out of the building. The street was empty, except for a Buick parked at the curb. He stopped when he saw who was in it. Frank Regalbuto was behind the wheel. Tony Fargo sat beside him.

Longobardo checked the impulse to run. If they knew, he was finished anyway and no good running. If they didn't know, it would make them suspect.

He forced himself to walk to the car and smile. "Hi, Tony. How're you doing, Francesco?"

Frank said, "I'm fine, Arnaldo."

Tony said, "I'm sorry, Arnaldo." He brought an ugly, short-barreled pistol up.

Longobardo stared into the small dark mouth of the gun and heard the terribly loud noise it made.

His body fell heavily to the curb, his head lolling into the gutter.

Tony opened the car door and leaned out. He put the gun to Longobardo's ear and fired again. Longobardo's head bounced, then smacked back down on the cement.

Tony shut the door. Frank drove away with a squealing of tires.

Longobardo lay where he'd fallen, his blood flowing into the gutter.

II

WAR

EIGHT

THE TWA jumbo from Rome banked heavily over the ocean and turned into its assigned flight path descent to New York's Kennedy Airport. Frank Regalbuto buckled his seatbelt in compliance with the overhead sign that had just blinked on and lit a final cigarette. Outside of a few airline personnel riding free, there were only three other passengers in the first class section; elderly, uninteresting types. It had been a long, dull flight. But Frank didn't mind. He'd had a lot to think about.

Most of it was exciting. In the five weeks since his father had died, Frank had grown up. He could feel it. He could tell by the way others were beginning to act with him that they felt it, too. Most of all, these last three weeks in Europe had given him the confidence to shed his act as just the Old Man's good-natured, not-too-aggressive kid.

When the Commission had met in Vegas, his resentment at not taking over command of the Regalbuto Family had not really gone very deep. He himself had known—better than the others—that he didn't have the weight to handle it. But by the time he'd boarded the 747 to return to America, he knew he was going to *be* ready—in a year, maybe less.

Angelo DiMorra had suggested the trip shortly after returning from Vegas. It made sense. As DiMorra pointed out, if Frank was going to run the city's narcotics business, he ought to get to know personally the main people involved in acquiring, processing, and smuggling the stuff.

They had only one disagreement concerning this trip

Frank was to make. Frank didn't want to confine it to just making contacts.

"While I'm at it, I might as well set up the arrangements for another shipment. That last shipment isn't going to last long, the way it's selling."

DiMorra considered it, then shook his head. "No. First make the contacts, see the way things are. When you get back, we'll talk over what you find out. *Then* we can figure what we want to do, and you can head back there again and set it up."

They had argued, but not for long. DiMorra was adamant. Frank was pretty sure DiMorra wanted to test his judgment on a dry run before letting him go over to pull off the real thing. But Frank had his own thoughts about that.

When he'd left America, he'd had enough money on him for a down payment on a shipment of fifty kilos. Almost twice the last shipment. It was all his own money.

He'd known by then that he wasn't the same man he'd been before his father died. Maybe DiMorra didn't know it yet; but he'd learn.

Frank didn't expect to be able to keep it a secret for long. He didn't intend to try. When he got back with the first steps accomplished, he'd tell DiMorra and let him buy in. Once it was a done thing, DiMorra would be stupid not to want a chunk of the action. DiMorra might be a little sore at first. But Frank was almost certain that the old *mustachio* would also—if Frank managed to pull it off with no boners—have to respect his nerve and initiative.

He flew to Paris and took the train down to Cannes. There he lolled in the sun a couple days, playing with the French whores, acting the part of a man with nothing on his mind but a fun vacation. Then he drove a rented car to Marseilles, doubling back on enough untrafficked country roads to shake any narcotics agents. If there were any narcs tailing him, he was sure none of them managed to stay with him the whole way.

In Marseilles he met with two men who owned rival laboratories for processing heroin. He measured them and

made his choice. But he didn't bother to go see any of the Corsicans about handling the final shipment. The narcs in America had become too thorough in their investigation of all cargo coming in from France lately. Frank had his own ideas about that final transport job.

From Marseilles he flew to Istanbul and arranged with a Turkish government official, whose sideline was contacting the poppy farmers, to acquire the necessary quantity of opium stock. His next stop was Damascus. A Syrian smuggler agreed, for a price that was fair considering the risks, to make the pickup in Kilis, Turkey, and move the stuff to Lebanon. In Beirut, Frank arranged with the Arab to hide the shipment until someone came for it.

Then Frank flew to Rome. For the first two days he played at sightseeing. For the first two nights he drove a car out to pick up a top call girl, took her to his suite at the Excelsior, and drove her back home just before dawn. On the third night, when he was certain he wasn't being followed, he kept going after taking her home, south to Naples. There he had a talk with the captain of a freighter plying the Mediterranean ports. When he got the word from Frank, he would carry the shipment from Beirut to the secret laboratory in Marseilles.

Frank drove north to Genoa and went to see a man who had been a friend of his father's back home. This man had tired of the New World and its gang wars. He had taken his profits and returned to Italy, married a sixteen-year-old farm girl, and invested his money in strictly legitimate businesses—including a car-rental firm. He listened to what Frank had in mind.

He smiled and patted Frank's cheek approvingly. "Just like your father. Smart. Ambitious." For old times' sake and a hefty fee he agreed to carry out the last two stages.

The first part was easy, getting the shipment from the Marseilles laboratory to Genoa. A "tourist" with a rented car. The second part turned out to be simple also. Down the coast an American couple spending a year abroad were renting a beach house from him. They were due to return home to Baltimore in a month, which made the

timing right. When their car, a Buick, was put aboard the ship in Genoa, the American couple would have no reason to suspect that its tires, including the spare, had been filled by special tubes containing pure raw heroin. When the ship reached the Baltimore docks—that was Frank's problem.

Frank drove back down to Rome and caught the next plane to New York. He had every reason to be pleased with himself and satisfied with what he'd accomplished. There was only one sour note.

Ruby Dunne.

He'd missed her. That was part of it. Being away from her this long had made him realize just how deeply she had hooked him, and without half trying. Maybe it was also his abrupt maturing which made him think about her so much. He had played around with a hell of a lot of women in his life, starting when he was fourteen. There was nothing wrong in that; it had been fun and would continue being fun. But Ruby he was serious about. That was why he hadn't pushed with her, had not made any really strong attempt to get her into bed. He respected her, *wanted* to respect her.

She was the kind of woman you married, when you were ready for it. That she wasn't Italian didn't matter. She was the one he wanted.

So missing her, being eager to be back with her, was part of what was bothering him. The other part was that he was worried about her.

She'd been funny with him after Vegas; sort of stiff and uneasy. But he figured that was just nervousness; she was uptight about the interest shown in her by the music people she'd met through DiMorra. He couldn't blame her for that. They had promised to arrange an audition in New York with the head of a record company. If she passed it, they'd cut a record with her; if she failed, she was worse off than before.

Frank personally didn't care if she became a star or not. But he understood it mattered to her.

But the other thing was the letters. She'd promised to write and let him know how she made out, sending the letters to the Excelsior in Rome, where they'd be held till he got there.

When he reached Rome, there were no letters waiting. He tried to put in a long-distance call to her apartment back home, but there was no one there . . .

Above Frank the no smoking sign blinked on, and the voice of the stewardess announced they'd be landing in New York in a few minutes. Frank stubbed out his cigarette and leaned back in his seat, closing his eyes for the landing. He told himself he was being overanxious, worrying about nothing. She'd probably had the audition, been a hit, and was busy as hell making her first record by now. Too busy to write. He couldn't be too sore about that.

Frank found himself beginning to smile as he thought about Ruby, and being with her again. He wasn't even going to leave the airport to visit New York. He'd just grab the next connection and fly on home. To Ruby.

He was going to hand her a real surprise. No preliminaries. Just barge in on her and ask her to marry him.

Frank's smile broadened as he imagined her shock.

He had just come through customs when he heard his name being paged on the public address system. "Mr. Frank Regalbuto, please come to the public information counter . . ."

Warily, he made his way through the crowded airline terminal. There didn't seem to be anyone watching him. But that didn't mean no one was.

The girl behind the information counter smiled pleasantly. "There's a message for you . . ." She hunted around and found an envelope.

Turning his back on the counter, he scanned the area quickly again before opening the envelope. Inside was a folded sheet of paper and a smaller envelope. He unfolded the paper. On it was a typewritten note, not signed: "If you are still interested in Ruby Dunne, she's in New York

at 415 East 86th Street. Apartment 7-D. That's where she lives now. With a man."

With numbed fingers Frank opened the smaller envelope. Inside it was a key.

It was a brand-new apartment building with a fountain out front. Frank got out of the cab and looked at it for a moment. He wasn't thinking. His brain was cold frozen. He went in past a uniformed doorman, walking carefully, like a man who'd had too much to drink but was not quite drunk yet. The elevator was automatic. He got out at the seventh floor.

At the end of a carpeted hall was a door marked 7-D. Under the bell button was a name plate: R. Dunne. Frank pressed the button, heard the chimes ring inside.

He waited.

No one answered.

He took the key from his pocket. It fitted.

Stepping into a small foyer, he shut the door behind him and looked around.

The walls were egg white, the carpeting was subdued blue, and most of the furniture was Scandinavian wood. Thrown across the arm of a couch was an expensive scarf Frank had bought for Ruby shortly after he'd met her. There was an abstract painting on one wall he recognized from her apartment back home. She'd painted it herself. Frank didn't know much about art, but the violence of the slashing colors had always surprised him, coming from a girl that self-contained.

There was a pair of brown slippers on the blue carpet near a wingchair.

A man's slippers.

Frank felt the horns growing on him. He walked heavily to the bedroom. His mind was a jumble of filthy, sickening images. Blood pounded in his ears, burned in his veins.

Most of one bedroom wall was taken up by a walk-in closet. Frank slid open the doors. The clothes were mostly

Ruby's. But there was also a man's sports jacket and slacks, a man's pajamas, a man's robe, two pairs of men's shoes.

He walked to the bathroom. Among the clutter of Ruby's toiletries were a man's electric razor and a set of aftershave lotion, cologne, and talcum powder.

Turning on his heel, Frank went quickly into the apartment's small kitchen, banged open doors until he found the liquor. He grabbed a bottle of Scotch and drank deeply from it, not bothering with a glass.

It was almost night when Ruby Dunne let herself into her new apartment. She took a few steps inside and came to a dead halt, her hands flying up to her open mouth to block a scream.

The brand-new couch had been savagely slashed open by a knife. Her abstract painting had been ripped to hanging tatters. The coffee table had been kicked over, spilling the things on it across the carpet.

Frank sat in the wingchair, looking at her.

It took time for Ruby to find her voice. Frank waited. He didn't say anything, just watched her.

"My God, Frank . . ." Her voice was shaking.

There was another long moment before he spoke. "You moved to New York. I didn't know."

"I got a record contract. It seemed best for a while . . . to be near the . . . I'm still keeping my place back home, but . . ." She faltered and stopped.

He had risen to his feet. He kicked one of the slippers across the carpet. It hit her ankle softly.

"Who is the man?" His voice was quiet. Too quiet.

She had to swallow before she could get a word out. "Frank . . . listen . . ."

She had never been frightened of him. Suddenly, she was very frightened.

He moved towards her. His face was wooden. Something peculiar flickered in the depths of his dark blue eyes.

She had never seen that expression on his face before.

People who had known Frank Regalbuto all his life would not have recognized that expression.

Angelo DiMorra lived in a big, Tudor-style mansion in the country beyond the city's suburbs. The main function of the location was to afford him absolute privacy. The local and county cops were on his payroll. They didn't have to do much for their money; just make sure nobody bothered him. They did a pretty good job of fending off unwanted visitors, including state and federal cops. DiMorra's estate was a large, wooded area, its boundaries efficiently guarded on the outside by the local law, on the inside by *soldati* of the DiMorra family. It surrounded a lake that had been big enough in the old Prohibition days for small seaplanes to land at night with their cargoes of bootleg liquor.

DiMorra had always been comfortable here, eager to get back to it when he was away. It was from here that he preferred to run his various business enterprises, including his main business—overseeing all the gambling in the city. When he was not working, he liked to swim in the lake, if it was warm; or to sit on the terrace gazing across its surface at all the trees he owned.

But DiMorra no longer felt the old contentment when he was at home in his country estate. He was increasingly impatient to get away. To New York.

When he'd gotten Ruby that apartment, he'd contemplated spending maybe one day a week with her there. But he'd soon found that even a few days away from her left him feeling like an old man again. He was developing a need for her that was as strong as her need for him. There was no question of marriage of course. It would never have occurred to DiMorra to consider divorcing his wife. That would make him look ridiculous.

But Ruby Dunne had become his most precious possession, giving him a sweet agony he could no longer do without.

On this particular evening he had an extra reason for

his impatience to get away from his estate. Frank Regalbuto should have been here by now. He'd cabled from Rome that he'd arrive by late afternoon. It was eight P.M., and Frank still hadn't showed.

DiMorra hadn't been exactly looking forward to the meeting with Frank. But he'd been prepared to see it through and get it behind them. As soon as they were finished with the business of Frank's exploratory trip, they would go on to the personal matter.

As DiMorra saw it, Frank wouldn't have a legitimate beef. Ruby hadn't really been his. She had never pretended to feel about him the way he thought he felt about her. He'd admitted himself she wouldn't let him have relations with her. Under those circumstances, Ruby had a right to fall in love with another man. And another man had a right to claim what Frank didn't really have.

Frank might not like it, but he'd have to take it. DiMorra intended to have him watched in case any lingering resentment made him try anything foolish.

When Frank didn't show or call by six P.M., DiMorra began to worry. Joe Lucci made a call to New York and learned that Frank's plane had landed at two P.M. In the last two hours DiMorra had phoned Ruby's apartment three times. There was nobody there.

DiMorra moved with unaccustomed haste through his last piece of business for the day: an irritable session with his son-in-law, Johnny Tresca. Johnny was the only one of his daughter's husbands who was in the family business. Johnny had been one of the Fargo gang's enforcers, an unusually efficient executioner, when he'd married the youngest DiMorra girl. He'd moved over, and DiMorra (as a wedding present) had moved him up the ladder, backing him in a policy bank of his own.

DiMorra had since regretted it. Johnny Tresca didn't handle his finances carefully enough, lived too high, threw all his profits around like there was no tomorrow. Which was why he was in trouble again. In the numbers racket you had to have a cash reserve against the day too many of your customers got lucky. Which was what had hap-

pened now. A bunch of his customers had hit heavy on a number, putting Johnny Tresca's bank in a hole. He was asking his father-in-law to bail him out.

DiMorra intended to, but not until after delivering himself of a harsh lecture about saving for a rainy day. Tresca listened to all of it in stiff-faced silence, not allowing his resentment to show. There was a lot he didn't express his resentment about; like his wife cheating on him and his being afraid to beat the shit out of her like she deserved because of her father.

When the lecture was over, Tresca said, "All right, I understand. You're right. But I still need the dough. Or I'm out of business."

DiMorra nodded sternly. "That we both know. Okay, one last time. Go see Bud Riley. Tell him I said he should lend you the money."

Tresca made a face. Riley ran the city's loanshark business. "The interest that bastard charges, it'll take me months to climb out of the hole."

DiMorra stood up. "Maybe it'll teach you the value of money. You don't learn that, you might as well quit now."

Johnny Tresca sighed and followed him out of the study. In the main hall of the house they ran into DiMorra's wife.

"Supper's almost ready." She looked at Tresca. "You'll eat with us, Johnny. Okay?"

He grinned at her. "Would I pass up one of *your* meals, Mama? Beats me how a daughter of yours can be such a lousy cook."

She smiled and patted his cheek. "She'll learn. Give her time. Young girls these days, they just don't pay enough attention to making the man happy."

Johnny Tresca had always been more popular with her than with her husband.

"I can't stay," DiMorra told her. "Got some business to take care of."

Joe Lucci drove him out to the airport. It was midnight when the cab carried them from Kennedy Airport into Manhattan. The doorman of the apartment building hur-

ried to open the cab door for them. There was an unhappy look on his face.

"I got some bad news for you, Mr. Dunne." He didn't know DiMorra's real name. "We had some trouble . . . Your wife—"

"What happened?" DiMorra growled. "Spit it out."

"She got hurt. Somebody beat her up. Pretty bad."

DiMorra felt like a cake of ice had suddenly formed in his chest. "Who?" he whispered. But he already knew.

The doorman shook his head helplessly. "She told the cops she couldn't identify him. He was wearing a mask. A burglar. She said he was in there, starting to rob the place, when she came home."

DiMorra pushed him aside to go in.

"She ain't there," the doorman told him quickly. "Like I said, it was pretty bad. They had to take her to the hospital."

"What hospital?"

The doorman told him. DiMorra shoved back in the cab with Lucci and repeated the hospital name to the driver. "You get a ten-buck tip if you make it in five minutes."

Ruby was on the sixth floor of the hospital. The nurse in charge of the floor consulted her book. "Ruby Dunne. Oh, yes. The doctor has left instructions she can only see close family until tomorrow. She's under sedation."

"I'm her uncle," DiMorra snapped. "Where is she?"

"Ward C. Please don't stay more than a few minutes—"

"A ward? What the hell's she doing in a ward? Why ain't she in a private room?"

The nurse flinched before his fury. "Well, she was in no condition to discuss the financial arrangements when they brought her in. She came in through Emergency. We didn't even know if she had any hospitalization insurance or—"

"Move her to a room. Now. Her own room."

The nurse looked at him and didn't argue. "Yes, sir." She jumped up from behind her desk and hurried off down the corridor to check the private rooms.

DiMorra strode along the corridor in the opposite direction to Ward C. Joe Lucci had to move fast to keep up with him.

Ruby lay in one of the beds near the door. She was not asleep, but she was heavily drugged, not fully awake. Her whole face was discolored. Her eyes were swollen almost shut. The worst bruise spread from her smashed nose, which had been given a preliminary straightening and was stuffed with blood-stained cotton. She was breathing through her open mouth. Three of her teeth were gone.

DiMorra's first feeling was so deep and sharp that in another man it would have been followed by tears. His first thought was that he'd failed to protect her.

He bent down and touched her shoulder carefully. "Ruby?"

She turned her head slowly on the pillow, looked up at him through the slits in the dark swollen flesh around her eyes. Otherwise, she gave no response to his presence.

"Ruby, who did this to you?"

Her tongue crept out through the gap in her teeth, licked at her cracked lips. Her voice was so low he had to lean closer to hear.

She repeated the word. "Frank . . ."

DiMorra straightened, touched her shoulder again. "You're gonna be all right. I swear it. The best doctors. They'll fix your face like new. Just rest easy. I'll be right back. We're gonna move you to a private room."

He turned and went back out to the corridor. As Joe Lucci followed him, he drew a deep breath, let it out slow.

"Go home," he told Lucci. "Get Ralph Negri. Then go find Frank."

Lucci nodded solemnly. "You want him hit? Or brought to you?"

"I want him dead," DiMorra said in a cold, flat voice. "I don't ever want to have to see him again. Kill him."

NINE

RALPH Negri wasn't like Joe Lucci. He didn't have Lucci's physical strength and endurance. Of the two of them Negri was considered the more deadly. He'd killed his first man when he was sixteen and had been perfecting his special skills ever since. But his deadliness was confined to the gun or the knife. He couldn't deal out violence with his fists the way Lucci could. He was too skinny, his bones too fragile. He'd been sickly all his life. His medicine cabinet was crammed with pills, and he always carried emergency supplies with him. At thirty-six he was already completely bald. He had to wear tinted glasses even at night to protect eyes that were oversensitive to light.

Negri felt the weariness draining him now as he sat in the car with Lucci, watching Frank Regalbuto's apartment house. They'd been here almost two hours, waiting in vain. They'd been searching for Frank since seven that morning.

It would be dark soon. In a way Negri was glad of that. Daylight hits made him nervous. But he wasn't going to be worth much when they finally did spot Frank, if he let the weariness bog him down.

Fishing around in his pocket, Negri brought out two small pill bottles. He looked at them, put one back in his pocket, opened the other, and shook a pill into his palm. Working up some saliva, he popped the pill into his mouth, swallowed it down. Lucci looked at him curiously.

"A bennie," Negri explained. "I'm winding down. You better have one, too. I got a hunch we're gonna have a long night ahead of us."

Lucci looked uncertainly at the pill Negri held out to him. "I can't swallow it dry like you."

"So go in the diner there and get a glass of water. You can call in while you're at it."

Lucci nodded, took the pill, and got out of the car. Negri watched him go into the diner. Then his eyes returned to Frank's apartment house.

The tiredness was already lifting; his brain was getting sharp again. It was just the psychological effect of taking the bennie, Negri knew. The real chemical pickup didn't come for half an hour. He thought about all the places they'd searched for Frank during that long day; began considering likely places to look during the night.

Lucci came out of the diner and got back into the car.

"Any word on Frank?" Negri asked him.

"No." Lucci shut the door and put his hands on the steering wheel, gazed through the windshield with a slight, thoughtful frown.

"DiMorra back yet?"

"No."

Negri studied Lucci through his tinted lenses. "What's bugging you?"

"I think," Lucci said slowly, "we been looking everyplace except the right place. Frank's uncle's been calling for DiMorra. Last time he left word for DiMorra to phone him soon as he gets in. Urgent."

Negri whistled softly through his teeth. "Sure. It figures. If Frank knows he's in trouble, where else would he run to?"

Lucci nodded, thinking about it some more.

Negri felt the familiar constriction in his scrawny chest. Instinctively, one hand came up to rub the flat bulge of the .45 government automatic holstered under his armpit.

"So okay—let's go get him."

Joe Lucci started the motor and let out the brake. Pulling away from the curb, he began to work the car through the heavy midcity traffic to Vito Riccobono's place.

At that moment Louis (The Accountant) Orlando was in a big bedroom at the Starlite Motel, getting the tension out of his system with the help of his wife and a new prostitute she'd acquired that week.

Outside, the red neon glow of the no vacancy sign showed up brighter as it began to get dark. Night or day the no vacancy sign was always on. In spite of that, cars came into the motel parking area and left it in surprising numbers. Especially at night. Most of the drivers were affluent looking men. Their cars remained in the parking area for varying lengths of time, a few of them all night. But the average time was one hour.

It didn't take a very smart cop to figure out that the Starlite Motel was a whorehouse. The most expensive whorehouse in the city area.

But the Starlite Motel was located in the suburbs, where police salaries were even lower than in the city proper. The payment the local cops got from the Starlite every Monday morning at ten o'clock on the dot helped them make ends meet.

The Starlite Motel consisted of three modern buildings connected by short, covered walks. The smallest building was the office. The largest had twenty motel room units, where the girls employed by Marie Orlando lived and worked. The Accountant's wife knew how to pick them. Her girls were the youngest, best-looking whores in the state. And after a short training session by Marie, they were also the most accomplished, adept at every perversion.

Between these two buildings was a large unit which served as home for The Accountant and his wife. It was in the large bedroom of this unit that they were currently amusing themselves with the new hooker.

The Accountant sat naked in a large black leather armchair, watching the girl with slowly rising lust. Her name was Enid, and she wasn't more than eighteen. She was a natural redhead with a delightful sprinkle of freckles on

her pert, little-girl face and her slender, naked body. She wasn't an amateur, but she looked a little frightened as she crouched there on her hands and knees in the middle of the thick bedroom carpet. The only thing she wore was a dog collar fastened around her neck.

Marie Orlando was naked, too, except for high black leather boots and a heavy black belt, decorated with bright iron studs, around her ripe waist. Marie's figure was voluptuous; her face had a look of cruel anticipation. She held the leash attached to the dog collar around the girl's neck. With her other hand she raised a riding crop and flicked it down across the taut roundness of Enid's buttocks. The girl flinched and gasped but did not try to protect herself.

"Move, bitch!" Marie ordered. Her voice was harsh, thick.

The girl began to crawl at the end of the leash towards the waiting Orlando.

The phone rang. The Accountant looked at it, startled half-way out of his fantasy. Marie tugged the girl to an abrupt halt with the leash.

Irritably, The Accountant rose and picked up the phone. "What is it?" he snapped.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Orlando," the clerk said at the other end of the phone in the office. "But Mr. Riccobono is on the line. I told him you'd call back later, but he says it won't wait, that it's urgent he talk to you right away."

"Hold on." The Accountant covered the mouthpiece and looked at the girl crouching on the floor. "Get out."

She didn't respond quickly enough. Savagely, Marie yanked her to her feet with the dog leash. Enid choked and clawed at the collar to ease the strangling pressure. Marie let go of the leash and opened the door, slashed the riding crop across the backs of Enid's thighs.

"Out!"

The girl rushed out, still naked except for the dog collar and dangling leash. Marie shut the door.

The Accountant took his hand from the mouthpiece. "Put him through."

Marie leaned against the door, watching her husband tensely.

"What's so urgent, Vito?" The Accountant asked into the phone. After that he listened. He listened a long time. Gradually, a tight eager smile began to stretch the ends of his thin mouth.

It had worked. Almost as well as he'd hoped it would, when he'd arranged for the message to be waiting for Frank at Kennedy Airport.

Finally, he spoke into the phone again. "All right, Vito. You can bring him over. I want to talk to him in person before I decide what to do. If anything."

He hung up and looked at his wife. "We got lucky," he told her in a low voice quivering with excitement.

Marie stared at him, wide eyed. "Frank killed DiMorra?"

He shook his head. "Not that lucky. But he beat up the girl, bad enough to send her to the hospital. He figures DiMorra might be putting out a contract on him because of it. *I* figure he could be right."

"But . . . that's not what we thought would—"

"*I* thought of it," he told her thinly. "It was one of the possibilities I considered. You don't make a move against an opponent without figuring out all the possible countermoves. And how to turn them against him."

Marie studied her husband nervously. "But . . . bringing Frank here. That could get us in real trouble—"

His laugh was nasty. "*Now* you're worried?"

"I just hope you know what you're doing."

"Well, that's my department. Right? I mean, you're the one keeps nagging at me to do something. But I'm the one that has to figure out how to get it done."

Vito Riccobono put down his phone and looked at his nephew, who was refilling his glass from the Scotch bottle.

"Go easy on that stuff, Frank. The Accountant wants us to come over and tell him about it. I think he'll help."

Frank took a long swallow of Scotch. His face remained savage, sullen. "Why should he?"

Riccobono shrugged. "Because I'm his man now. Because he's greedy and wants a bigger slice than he got in Vegas. Because if there's bad blood between you and Angelo DiMorra, the logical thing is for you to shift over to Orlando with me."

"Orlando doesn't have the guns to protect me from DiMorra."

"We're not gonna ask him to *protect* you. Just to keep you hid awhile and help me put your side of it to DiMorra. Nobody'd look for you there. That gives us time to talk to DiMorra, make him see it the way it is. We'll explain to him what you said, that you didn't know *he* was the man she was living with there. That she didn't tell you till after you'd beat her up. That you wouldn't have done it if you'd known he was the one."

"Maybe," Frank growled. "But maybe I would have anyway. The sonofabitch put horns on me. He knew she was my girl."

Vito Riccobono looked at him wearily. "No, she wasn't, Frankie. You wanted her, that's different. She didn't want you back."

Frank glared down at the glass he was squeezing in his fist. "If I had any guts, I'd be out hunting the bastard to kill him. Instead of sitting here, worrying if he's hunting me."

"You better learn to handle that temper of yours, Frankie. Or we ain't never gonna be able to get you out of this."

"Uncle Vito, I got a feeling there ain't *going* to be any easy way out."

'Angelo DiMorra's a reasonable guy. There's a lot of people from your father's family wouldn't take it good if you got hurt over what's really just a personal matter. When DiMorra simmers down, he'll see it ain't reasonable to let a personal thing louse up business relationships." He took the glass from his nephew's hand and put it down. "Come on, Frankie, let's go."

It had gotten dark. Vito flicked on the light at the top of

the stairs and led the way down to the entrance hall of the old brownstone. He had lived here twenty-five years. His wife had died ten years ago. The last of his children had grown up and moved away four years ago. He paused at the foot of the steps and looked at Frank.

"You know, it gets lonely, living here all by myself. Maybe after we get you past this trouble, you'd like to move in with me? A lot of room. You could have your girls here, I wouldn't mind. I wouldn't charge you much, either."

In spite of himself, Frank laughed. "Suppose we get the heat off me first? Then we can haggle over the rent."

Vito grinned, patted him on the shoulder. "Okay, Frankie." He opened the front door.

Vito's car was parked at the curb out front. Vito gave Frank the keys as they went down the four stone steps outside the brownstone. "You drive. My eyes ain't so good anymore at night."

Frank started across the pavement to the car, ahead of him.

Vito, following, was the first one to see the other car as it suddenly pulled away from the corner and came racing down the street toward them.

Vito was getting old, but he'd been in enough similar situations in his time to react instinctively without having to stop and think about it. He grabbed at Frank, yanked him away from the car.

"The alley!" he snarled and shoved Frank toward it.

Frank stumbled and caught his balance, looked back at the car bearing down on them.

Vito pushed Frank ahead of him with both hands. "Quick!" Frank unfroze and jumped for the alley just as the car jolted to a stop with one wheel up on the curb. Ralph Negri leaned out the front window and took aim with the .45 automatic.

Vito lumbered after Frank. The movement put him directly in Negri's line of fire just as he squeezed the trigger.

The big automatic roared. The heavy .45 slug smashed

into Vito's spine, breaking it and hurling him forward against Frank. The two of them fell in a tangle inside the shadowy mouth of the alley.

Frank dragged himself out from under his uncle's limp weight. The side of Vito's face lay on the cement. His eyes were open, and he was not quite dead yet.

His lips worked to get the words out. "Run . . . run . . ." Bloody drool ran from the corner of his mouth.

Negri's gun roared again. The slug whined off the brick side of the alley. Frank did a fast roll, deeper inside the alley. He scrambled to his feet and ran to the end of it.

The end was blocked by a high wooden fence. Behind him Frank heard the slamming of car doors. He raised his arms and jumped. His hands caught the top of the fence. Dragging himself up over it, he dropped down on the other side.

He landed knee-deep in garbage and trash. He was in a big airshaft surrounded by blackened brick walls. High above him on one of the walls was a rusty, unused fire escape ladder. Footsteps were rushing down the alley toward him on the other side of the fence. Quickly, Frank dragged over a box of trash, climbed onto it.

Standing on tiptoes and stretching, he was just able to get hold of the rust-flaked bottom rung of the ladder. Using all the strength of his shoulders and arms, he hauled himself up, managed to get one foot on the rung.

He went all the way up the ladder to a high roof without a shot being fired at him. The roof was slanted. He had to balance carefully as he made his way across its dark surface. At the other side he looked down at the street below. The two cars were there. But there was no way down.

Frank made his way quickly but cautiously to another end of the roof. Here there was a fire escape stairway, leading down between the backs of four commercial buildings to the tar roof of a lower building. The wall directly below him was blank. But across the opening another fire escape led up another wall past closed doors and windows.

Frank's heart was thudding sickeningly as he raced down the fire escape. He tripped sprinting across the lower

roof and almost vomited from the lurch of fear in his guts. Scrambling back to his feet, his right trouser leg torn and his knee bleeding, he got to the other fire escape and charged up to the first landing.

There was a locked wooden door there with a red exit sign on it. He threw himself against the door. It didn't give. Panting, fighting dizziness, he backed off a step, raised his leg, and rammed the heel of his shoe as hard as he could against the door just above the knob.

The lock ripped out with a splintering of rotten wood. The door sagged inward. Frank chanced a look back over his shoulder.

The shadowy figures of Negri and Lucci appeared on the top of the roof across the way.

Frank dove head first into the darkness inside the smashed door, just as the guns of both his pursuers crashed down at him. He landed inside on one shoulder, did a fast roll into the protective darkness as bullets gouged the wall above him, covering him with showers of plaster dust.

Then he was on his feet, feeling his way breathlessly through the darkness. He found a door, unlocked it, and went through to the landing of an inner stairway. The key his uncle had given him was in his hand as he sprinted down the steps and out onto the pavement. He went around the corner as fast as he could. Vito lay where he'd left him, half inside the alley. Frank didn't stop to see if he was dead. He knew.

The gunmen's car was still there with its doors open and one wheel up on the curb. He ran around it to Vito's car, jumped in and stabbed the key at the ignition.

At the second try he got it in. Hot sweat stung his eyes as he got the motor started. Letting out the brake with a snap, he gunned away from the curb.

He took the first corner with the accelerator shoved down hard to the floor and sped away in the night with the car revving up to full speed, flat out.

TEN

THE LIVING room of Vincent Fargo's old-fashioned three-decker house on Kelsey Street was dark except for the glow of the color TV. The three of them sat watching an old Humphrey Bogart movie. Vince was in the big, sagging easy chair that had been Papa Fargo's, his shoes off and his feet up on a hassock. His wife Nella was on the sofa with Tony, her bare feet tucked under her; a warm, softly plump, womanly presence.

Tony Fargo leaned back on the sofa and sipped the cool white wine Nella always kept for him. She and Vince stuck to red. He let his thoughts wander aimlessly, pleasantly. Vince and Nella were absorbed in the movie. Tony was not. For some reason, television couldn't grab his attention for long; except sometimes the news. But he didn't mind. He felt comfortable just being there with Vince and Nella. This was home; this was family.

He was beginning to feel too content to go out and keep his date with that eager little bitch at the Beldon Hotel. Not that she wasn't great. She'd kept him up all last night, and he couldn't pretend he hadn't enjoyed every minute of it. But that was the thing with him: once he'd had a girl, he just wasn't much interested in having more of the same. Besides, he was feeling too lazy tonight. He preferred sitting here and sipping wine until he was sleepy enough to go up to his little bedroom for the night.

It had been his bedroom since he could remember. His childhood toys were still in it; things like the certificate he'd won as a high school wrestling champ before he dropped out. They kept it the way it was, always ready for

him—no matter how many guests they had staying over; no matter how long he stayed away.

This house had belonged to his mother and father before they'd died. They'd bought it forty years ago, the hard, slow way.

The houses on Kelsey Street might look poor to an uptown outsider. But they were rich compared to the rest of the neighborhood, known as the Conesburg section. Conesburg huddled alongside the river with its freight yards, factories, and warehouses. A city dump and a sulphur plant sent an unbreathable stench into the air on hot still days. Most of the dwellings were tenements. Only Kelsey Street had houses; and only the Fargo house had still not been subdivided into separate apartments.

All of the members of the Fargo gang were born in Conesburg, had been fighting as a gang since they were kids. It was no longer purely an Italian outfit. There were also Puerto Ricans and blacks, one Jew, an Irish kid, a couple Poles. But they had the tight-knit feeling that came from knowing that if they belonged to the Fargo gang, they were the toughest around. And they all lived in the area, which made it an easily defended kingdom for the Fargo brothers. Once in the days when they were still establishing themselves against other gangs—before they'd joined the Mafia—another gang had tried to invade their turf. Nobody had ever tried it again.

If Conesburg was the kingdom, Kelsey Street was its fortress, and the Fargo house was the castle within it.

It was as much Tony's house as Vince's, but Tony never thought of it that way. As the older brother, Vince was head of the family now. Besides, Vince was the one with the wife and kids. Tony didn't have any and didn't expect to have them in the future. Any more than he would ever have Vince's stubborn ambition or his ulcer.

Vince was the planner, the leader. Tony followed where his brother led and was satisfied with it that way. They both knew Vince wouldn't have gotten where he was today without Tony backing him up. But that didn't

change the fact that Tony lacked the drive necessary for leadership.

He was content to follow his older brother; just as he was content to spend the evening sitting here with Vince and Nella. It gave him a sense of belonging. Nella meant more to him than any girl he could screw. She was part sister to him, part mother. And part wife; without the sex, which made it even more comfortable.

Because Tony was not watching the film on TV, he was the one who first noticed Rosa standing in the dining room door. Rosa was the youngest of Vince's three kids, four years old and tiny for her age. She stood there in a night-gown reaching to her thin ankles, a thumb in her mouth, her big dark eyes glued to the TV screen.

"Hey, Rosy," Tony asked her lovingly. "What're you doing up?"

The little girl took the thumb from her mouth as her parents glared in her direction; but she didn't take her eyes off the TV. "I'm thirsty," she whined. "I wanna drink of water."

"Don't try pulling that stuff on *me*," Vince growled.

Rosa, not at all impressed by her father's angry voice, continued to watch the TV.

"Rosa," her mother snapped with quiet authority, "you know where the water is. Get it and get right back up to bed.

"I'm afraid to go up alone. It's dark."

Vince glared at her. "You weren't too scared to come *down*!"

Lazily, Tony rose to his feet. "S'all right, I'll take her up."

Nella gave him an exasperated look. "Tony, I keep telling you, you've got to stop spoiling her."

"Ah, come on, Nella . . ." Tony wheedled.

She heaved a helpless sigh. "Okay, but I'm sure glad you're not around all the time. You make it impossible to control the kids."

Tony grinned. It was understood she didn't mean it. He

went over and took little Rosa's tiny hand. She looked up at him with a coconspirator's smile as they went into the kitchen.

Tony snapped on the light, turned on the cold water spigot, and picked Rosa up. She weighed practically nothing. He held her over the sink. She lapped the water directly from the spigot with her tongue, like a kitten. It was one of their little games.

When she was done, he swung her up onto his thick shoulders, turned off the spigot and kitchen light, and carried her up the two flights of stairs to her small room. Holding her up high so she could touch the ceiling, he suddenly let her go. She dropped with a squeal of frightened delight, bounced on her bed, and then lay there giggling, her big eyes watching Tony adoringly.

"Now go to sleep," he told her, "or you'll get me in big trouble with Mommy."

He bent and kissed her tenderly on the mouth. She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him back fiercely.

"I love you, Uncle Tony."

He went back down the stairs feeling good; very good.

Vince and Nella didn't look up when he came back in. As he sat down, the movie on the TV screen suddenly blinked off and was replaced by an announcement sign: SPECIAL NEWS BULLETIN.

"We interrupt this program to bring you a special news bulletin," the voice of a newscaster announced unemotionally. "City authorities fear a new underworld war may be in the making following the gunning down tonight of underworld figure Vito Riccobono. Riccobono, brother-in-law of late reputed Mafia Don Paul Regalbuto was shot and killed in gangland fashion in front of his house by two unknown assailants. Neighbors who looked from their windows after hearing the first gunshots reported that the two gunmen also fired at and chased a second man. This man, who apparently escaped, has been tentatively identified as Frank Regalbuto. Police are searching for him,

hoping he will be able to shed some light on the killing of his uncle. There will be a full report on latest developments on the sign-off news, following the late movie."

The Bogart movie came back on the screen. Vince Fargo had taken his feet off the hassock and was sitting up straight, looking at Tony.

"Did you know Frankie was back?"

Tony shook his head. "Nope. What the hell's going on?"

Nella stood up. "Shall I make some coffee?" Her voice was low, tensed.

The phone rang. She looked at it but didn't move to pick it up. Vince heaved to his feet and lumbered over, lifted the phone.

"Yeah . . .?"

He listened, his meaty face becoming guarded as he registered what was being said at the other end. In a voice that gave absolutely nothing away, he said again, "Yeah . . ." He listened some more, and then still with no inflection he said "Okay" and hung up.

He looked at his wife. "How about that coffee?"

Nella hurried into the kitchen. It was neither her place nor her desire to know what was going on.

Vince looked at Tony, thinking things out as he spoke. "The Accountant. He wants us to come over to the Starlite."

"For what?"

"Frank's there."

For half an hour Louis Orlando did most of the talking. They sat there in the den he used as an office, all of them connected by taut-strung nerves: Orlando, Marie, Vince, Tony, Frank. Orlando outlined the situation in a soft, precise voice, ticking off item after item in the methodical manner that had gotten him his nickname.

Tony was watching Frank, who didn't look much like the Frankie he'd known before. This Frank sat there quiet and self-contained, waiting. He had the locked-in look of

a man keeping an explosive violence under rigid control. The businesslike ruthlessness in his eyes was new, too.

At first Tony had been puzzled by the way Frank looked. Then he'd realized where he'd seen it before. Frank's father, the old Don, used to look like that—when there was big trouble that had to be dealt with.

Vince interrupted The Accountant, looking to Frank. "You're sure it was Joe Lucci and Ralph Negri?"

"I'm sure," Frank said in a flat, quiet voice.

Vince shook his head. "DiMorra must be getting senile. Laying it all out in the open like that for a personal beef."

Orlando hunched forward eagerly, concentrating entirely on Vince, ignoring Tony. "He's getting *old*, that's for sure. When an old man lets himself get that crazy over a young girl . . ." He shook his head. "It means just one thing. He's just not competent to hold the position he does. Not any more. It's time for him to move over—or be moved. Do you agree?"

Vince just looked at him for a moment. Then he said, "Keep talking."

"I think it's time for younger men like us—men who still have the energy and brains—to take over this city and run it right. And the time is now. Because even the Commission'd have to agree, DiMorra started it, not us. He's gotten way out of line—killing Vito, trying to kill Frankie. For a personal matter. Nothing to do with business."

Frank spoke then, looking at both Vince and Tony. "That means I got a right to protect myself. And he's still after me, so the only way I can protect myself is to strike back at him. He's done a wrong thing. There's nobody who'll be able to say what he's doing ain't wrong, unfair, and bad for business. *He* broke the peace. I got a right to go with whoever'll help me—to protect myself and my interests."

Tony stirred uneasily in his chair and looked at Marie. "*She* shouldn't be here if we're gonna talk about things like this."

Marie Orlando stiffened with anger. "For Christ's sake,

Tony! Don't be a jerk. Louie don't have any secrets from me, you know that."

"It ain't right," Tony persisted stubbornly. "A woman don't belong in a talk like this."

"Tony . . ." The Accountant looked to Vince. "Marie already knows what's going on. She knows Frank's here—"

Vince nodded slowly. "Ease up, Tony. It's all right. Marie's not just a woman. She's part of the organization."

Tony raised and lowered his shoulders in a shrug and subsided into sullen silence.

The Accountant resumed his line of discussion. "The thing is, Vince, *I* can't protect Frank. You can."

"Why should I?" Vince demanded, but there was no refusal in his tone, just wary probing.

"Vince," Frank asked pointedly, "are you satisfied with what you got in Vegas?"

Vince considered that. "Being on our own now, that I like. Still having to run errands for DiMorra and Louie, that I don't like."

"We've got three families running this city," Frank said. "If we make the right moves fast enough, I'll wind up with my father's and Louie can keep Bruno's. And you get DiMorra's."

Vince's mouth laughed, but his eyes stayed interested. "Easy to say."

"It'll never be easier to do. It's all up for grabs, Vince. My father's dead; Bruno's still in the slam; and DiMorra —he's laid himself wide open."

The Accountant nodded emphatically. "Wide open—and all alone."

Vince looked at him sourly. "He's all alone with a pretty big army."

"You've got a better one."

"Maybe. Right now. But if it's gonna be war, DiMorra's got the dough to hire more men, import all he needs. I don't have that kind of dough. And if it comes to fighting, a lot of our operations're gonna get busted up, bringing our income down. Way down."

The Accountant cleared his throat. "I can help with the money end."

"Not enough, you can't."

Frank put in quietly. "I can."

Vince and Tony looked at him. He told them what he'd done while he was in Europe and the Mideast.

"DiMorra doesn't know about that shipment I set up. Even if he finds out, no part of it is his. In a month, when it's ready, I have to come up with the rest of the payment. Louie's ready to supply that for one-third of the profits." Frank paused for effect. "You and Tony get a third, if you help me against DiMorra. One third of a shipment that's worth about twenty million dollars, retail."

Vince and Tony looked at each other. They didn't have to put into words what that much money would mean to them. It would automatically jump them up into DiMorra's league. It had happened before in other parts of the country. That was the thing about heroin.

Vince turned to The Accountant. "What're you contributing to this outside of not too much backup dough?"

"I'm not in a position to contribute much else—openly. In a way that's good—if it looks like I've stayed out of it, seemingly not connected with what happens. The dons all over the country are going to react if DiMorra is hit. And here I'll sit, the perfect person to arbitrate in your favor as acting head of the Bruno family. To point out, as an impartial observer, that it was DiMorra who started the violence for a bad reason."

"And if it turns into a long thing," Marie Orlando added eagerly, "Louie'll be able to make them see it wouldn't be right to send DiMorra help from outside."

The Accountant nodded, keeping his eyes on Vince. "Result: you, me, and Frank take over from those tired old *mustachios*. By the time Bruno gets out, it'll be a done thing, and there's nothing he can do about it."

There was a barely perceptible change in Vince when he finally turned back to Frank. "Our best chance," he said quietly, "is to get it over with fast. A long war builds the odds in DiMorra's favor."

Frank tried not to show any gleam of triumph. He nodded matter-of-factly. "We concentrate on DiMorra himself first. Which means we need a way to keep tabs on his movements minute by minute."

"That requires getting to somebody who is on the inside with him," The Accountant said. "What about Johnny Tresca? I've been hearing he's not getting along with DiMorra's daughter."

Vince shook his head. "Uh-uh. Johnny takes that business with his wife pretty cool from what I can see. And he's still close with DiMorra: a son-in-law. Too close to take the chance of tipping him."

Tony looked at Frank. "You got anything against Ralph Negri?"

"No. Why should I? He's just carrying out orders like he's supposed to."

"I've been drinking some with Ralph lately. He ain't been happy since Johnny Tresca married DiMorra's daughter. DiMorra gave Tresca a policy bank Ralph figured he was in line for."

None of them had actually stated that they had all agreed to join forces in a war.

But they were already planning the first battle.

ELEVEN

DETECTIVE Sergeant Murray Grossman of the rackets squad slipped out of the District Attorney's crowded conference room by a side door to avoid the press. Nervously, he glanced up at the big round clock on the marble corridor wall. It was eleven in the morning.

He went toward his office, paused in front of his door, and glanced around the corridor. When he was sure he

was not being observed, he crossed the corridor and went through the fire-exit door and up the steps to the next floor. Unlocking the men's room door, he went in, making sure the door locked behind him.

There was a pay phone on the wall just inside. First he made sure no one else was in the men's room. Then he lifted the phone off the hook, dropped in a couple coins, and dialed an out-of-city number.

A man's voice he didn't recognize answered, "Yes?"

Sergeant Grossman put his mouth close to the phone. "I have to talk to Mr. D.," he said softly. "Tell him Murray G. is calling. Important."

"Hold on."

The sergeant waited, glancing anxiously at the shut door, praying for no one to come in.

"Yes . . .?" DiMorra's voice.

"Mr. D., Frank Regalbuto surrendered himself to the DA half an hour ago. Said he just heard the police were looking for him. He's in with the DA now."

There was a pause. "What's he saying?"

"Nothing. Not a thing. Claims he don't know who killed his uncle and tried to shoot him. Can't identify 'em; it was too dark. Doesn't have any idea why anybody'd do a thing like that. No enemies he knows about." The sergeant forced a laugh. "He told the DA maybe it was some juvenile delinquents who figured they had dough on 'em."

"Are you keeping him?"

"No chance. We can't prove he's lying. The DA's trying to break him down, but he won't make it. We'll have to let him go."

"How soon?"

"Another hour or so at a guess."

Another pause. "Thank you. There'll be a present in your mailbox tomorrow."

The line was disconnected at the other end.

Frank had to push through a crowd of reporters and news photographers to get down the Municipal Building's steps to the car waiting for him.

"No comment," he said to each of the questions hurled at him.

"Come on, Frankie," one of the reporters pleaded. "Give us a break. Somebody tried to kill you. We can help put pressure on the one that did it."

Frank paused thoughtfully at the bottom of the steps. Flashbulbs popped, the news cameras getting pictures of a serious young man with a lot on his mind.

"But I don't know who it is," Frank said, poker faced. "Anything else, you'll have to get from the District Attorney. I don't want to say anything that might interfere with his investigation. I intend to cooperate with him to the fullest in tracking down the hoodlums who killed my uncle."

With that he crossed to the car.

Vince Fargo sat behind the wheel. Tony Fargo stood by the open rear door, carefully scanning the area as Frank jumped in.

The reporters recognized him. "Hey, Tony, what's your part in this?"

"No part. I'm just a friend of Frank's. Old friend. Since we were kids."

"Who do you think tried to kill him?"

"I wouldn't know." Tony got in the back with Frank and shut the door. Vince started the car away from the curb.

Across the street another car did a tight U-turn and followed close behind. In it were three Fargo enforcers. The driver was a short, swarthy knife artist named Jorge Garcia. The two in the back seat were armed for trouble. Harold Early, a nineteen-year-old black kid who hardly ever talked because of a bad stutter, had one .38 caliber pistol holstered under his armpit and another in the pocket of his jacket. Augie (The Horse) Mondetto, his battered face advertising two years as a professional fighter, held a sawed-off automatic shotgun on his lap, covered by a raincoat. Garcia kept watch on the rear-view mirror as he stuck close to Vince's car. Early and Augie watched the side streets.

In Vince's car Frank looked back through the rear win-

dow as they worked through the heavy downtown lunch traffic. "If anybody besides your boys are tailing us, I can't see them."

"They're there, though," Tony stated, not bothering to look back.

Vince nodded behind the wheel up front. "It figures."

With the carload of protection sticking close behind all the way, Vince took the shortest route back to the safety of the Conesburg section. Turning into Kelsey Street, he drove past his home without slowing down. Two blocks further on, a block from the river was Bill Ryan's Garage.

The garage doors were closed. Next to the garage, a part of the same big building was a storefront office with Intercity Auto Repair Co. lettered on its window. The man behind the desk just inside the window, Diego Sabitini, saw Vince's car and the protection car slowing as they approached. He pressed the intercom button and spoke into it quickly.

The garage doors opened. Vince drove inside the garage. As the protection car followed him in, the doors were closed again by two Fargo *soldati*, Vic Caputo and a plump, balding black man known as Smitty. Both were armed. The interior was a large cavern lit by bare bulbs and neon tubes, fully equipped to make complete body and engine repairs on all kinds of vehicles. Up on a small balcony a large man sat in a rocking chair next to a small desk. He was called Irish Fagin to distinguish him from another Fargo soldier, Feigen the Jew. He had a submachinegun close to hand, held out of sight by a bracket behind the desk.

Vince parked between a truck up on blocks and a stripped-down Ford getting a new paint job, its engine hanging in the chains above it. Frank got out first, looking around. Tony climbed out and touched his arm. "Come on, I'll show you where we're shacking till this is over."

He led Frank through a door in the rear of the garage, started climbing four flights of narrow, linoleum-covered stairs.

The Fargo brothers had two headquarters. One was in

the suburbs, the Fargo Brothers Construction Company; an almost entirely legitimate operation. The other was this building here on Kelsey Street. The bottom part had been a movie house before Bill Ryan converted it. The two stories on top of it had once been rented offices.

Bill Ryan had sold out to the Fargos three years ago, retiring to Florida and leaving only his name behind. The two upper floors were now a clubhouse and free boarding house for members of the Fargo gang. The Intercity Auto Repair Company was the other big Fargo operation, run from a second office behind the storefront next to the garage. Part of this operation was legitimate; the larger part was not.

With a minimum of money and a maximum of muscle the Fargos so far had managed to get a grip on nineteen auto repair shops in the city and suburbs. The former owners had either wisely accepted positions as junior partners or even more wisely sold out completely for very little except peace of mind. Into these garages came stolen cars. Changed beyond recognition, they went out to be sold at the two Fargo used-car lots.

Between this set-up and the construction-contracting business the Fargo brothers had a growing income. But it was lean pickings compared to what the Bruno family, currently run by The Accountant, got from prostitution, union shakedowns, liquor distribution, bars, and vending machines. It was even leaner than the take of the DiMorra family.

But both would be a great deal fatter once DiMorra was out of the way. As agreed at the Starlite, The Accountant and his wife would get DiMorra's gambling and numbers racket, plus the loanshark operation. The Fargos would get DiMorra's trucking and freight-handling business, plus his big-fence operation in stolen freight from the airport, railroads, and trucking center. Frank, in addition to complete control of narcotics peddling, would get DiMorra's interests in bowling alleys, the garment businesses, and garbage disposal.

When and if Angelo DiMorra was taken care of.

The room to which Tony Fargo took Frank Regalbuto was on the top floor of the Kelsey Street headquarters. It was small and stark. A table and a chair, two Army cots with bare mattresses. An unusually tall, lanky man was asleep on one of the mattress in underwear and socks, his ankles and large feet sticking out past the end of the mattress.

Tony jerked a thumb at the sleeper. "You're sharing with Feigen the Jew. He works night shift."

Feigen opened his eyes slightly and raised a hand in greeting, then rolled over on his side and went back to sleep.

"Henry Shansky and Polish George are across the hall," Tony told Frank. "Me and Vince got the room down next to the toilet. Gonna be crowded for a while, you understand, so we all got to share."

Frank did understand. For the duration all the Fargo fighting forces would be drawn into this building, which was bound to become the number-one target for the enemy.

The Fargo home two blocks away would almost certainly be left alone. It was a seldom-broken rule that neither of the warring factions must endanger the families of the other. It would be too easy to retaliate against an offender's wife and children, mother and father. Just to make sure DiMorra's forces would have no justification for being tempted to violate the rule, even Vince Fargo would live here at headquarters until the war was over.

Frank went to the room's single window, pulled aside the black shade to look out at the buildings across the street.

"Better keep that shade down all the time," Tony said. "Just in case anybody gets ideas about taking potshots from over there."

Frank nodded and put the shade back in place. "What about the roof?"

"They can't get in that way. We're the highest building

around. Besides, Polish George is up there now, keeping watch." He nodded at Feigen the Jew. "When it's dark, he goes up."

They went out of the room, shutting the door quietly. "I want to get a change of clothes from my mother's place," Frank said as they started back down the stairs. "And a razor, toothbrush, stuff like that."

"Be safer to let somebody else pick 'em up. You can call your mother and let her know."

"You're right. Where do I phone from?"

"Down here." Tony led the way to a windowless office behind the Intercity Auto Repair Company's front office.

It was a plain, workmanlike room. A metal desk and chair, a long wooden bench, locked file cabinets against the walls. Frank made the call from the phone on the desk.

His mother's voice was guarded. "Are you all right, Frankie?"

"I'm fine. I don't want you to worry. I'm with Tony and Vince Fargo. They're taking good care of me, Ma. But I don't think it's a good idea for me to go to Uncle Vito's funeral. I'm sorry about that."

"You're right. Better to be safe." There was worry and sorrow, but no hysteria, in her voice. She had learned long ago as a peasant girl in Sicily that tragedy and violence were part of life. "Vince and Tony are good boys. Tell them I will light candles for them."

"I will, Ma. Look, somebody's gonna come over to pick up some of my things." Frank looked to Tony.

Tony said, "Henry Shansky."

"Henry Shansky," Frank repeated into the phone. "You know him?"

"Little Henry? Sure, I know him."

"So pack some things for me, will you? Pair of slacks, couple shirts, my razor, toothbrush, socks—"

"What d'you think?" she interrupted. "I don't know what kind of things you need?"

He laughed. "Okay. Just have it ready in a little suitcase. All right?"

"Sure. Frankie, be careful. Take care of yourself."

"I will, don't worry. I'll call you again when I can."

As Frank hung up, Tony said, "I'll go tell Shansky. Then let's grab a bite out of the refrigerator upstairs."

"First, can you get me a gun?"

Tony looked at Frank. "No problem. One thing we ain't got any shortage of here, it's guns."

Two hours later a long black limousine pulled to a stop across the street from the Fargo headquarters on Kelsey Street.

The driver was a hawk-faced man named Pete Lazzatti, a top pistol in DiMorra's freight-looting *brigata*. He parked and stayed behind the wheel, both hands on it in plain sight.

The two men who climbed out of the back seat were older, heavier, better dressed. DiMorra's older brother Mitch was also his *consigliero* and a *capo* Mafioso in his own right. Bud Riley ran the city's loanshark operation as an independent operation but with Angelo DiMorra as his *padrone* and political fixer. They crossed the street and entered the front office of the Intercity Auto Repair Company.

"We want to see Vince," Mitch DiMorra told Diego Sabitini.

"Sure." Diego had already informed the back office that they had arrived and been told what to do. He pointed to a short hallway at the rear. "Go right in."

Mitch and Riley followed the hall. It made a sharp turn before ending at a door. The door was opened by Victor Caputo before they could knock.

Vince sat behind his metal desk facing the door, his hands down on his lap, out of sight. Frank Regalbuto stood leaning against the file cabinets, thumbs hooked in the pockets of his slacks. His sports coat hung open, showing the grip of the snub-nosed .38 stuck in his belt. Riley looked at him nervously.

"We heard you were here, Frank."

"I'm here," Frank said tonelessly.

Caputo said, "I got to frisk both of you."

Mitch looked angrily at Vince. "You know neither of us ever carries a gun. Anyway, would we be dumb enough to come *here* armed?"

Vince tried to make his smile pleasant and understanding. "I know. But just to be sure."

Mitch DiMorra sighed and spread his arms slightly away from his body. Caputo's hands went over him lightly, quickly, and expertly: under the arms, the small of the back, pockets, between the thighs, the ankles. When he'd finished doing the same with Riley, he straightened and looked to Vince.

"They're clean."

"Wait outside, Vic."

Caputo went out and shut the door behind him.

Vince nodded at the wooden bench. "Sit down. Take the load off."

As they sat, Riley looked at Frank again. "Frank, you understand whatever we say, we ain't talking for ourselves. I got nothing against you, myself. We're just here to pass on what Don Angelo told us to say."

"I understand," Frank said. His face was wooden. Strange light flickered in his slitted eyes.

Mitch DiMorra kept his eyes on Vince. "Angelo wants to know how come you're taking Frank's side against him?"

"I'm not taking anybody's side. I'm just keeping Frank with me to make sure nobody hurts him. He's a friend of mine."

"Isn't Don Angelo your friend?" Mitch asked softly.

"Sure he is. I mean, I sure hope so. That's why I don't want him to get tempted to do something wrong. Something I figure he'd regret later. Like killing poor old Vito."

"That was an accident. It's Frank he's mad at."

Vince nodded. "Accidents happen when you set out to kill somebody for a personal matter. So he's mad at Frank. What the hell, does that mean he's got to *kill* him? Over what? A little twist he's got the hots for? That just ain't right. You know it ain't right."

"I'm not here to argue about that," Mitch said slowly. "I'm here to pass on Don Angelo's friendly suggestion."

"How friendly?"

"Stop shielding Frank. Just let him go. That's all."

"I can't do that. It wouldn't be right."

Mitch's eyes narrowed on Vince. But his voice was even. "Then you are taking a stand against Don Angelo. You don't expect him to take that laying down?"

"I'm not doing anything against the Don, and I don't intend to," Vince lied smoothly. "If he simmers down and acts reasonable. If he don't, I guess I'll have to do *something.*"

"Like what?" Mitch asked coldly.

"Like call for another meeting of the Commission. Like tell the Commission Angelo DiMorra's stirring up bad blood in this city because he's gone off his rocker over a *girl.*"

Mitch started to say something to that, changed his mind, and looked pointedly to Bud Riley.

Riley looked uncomfortably at Vince. It took him a moment to get started. "Vince, you're into me for a lot of dough to help you buy into all those garages."

"So? I been making my payments to you each week on the dot. With interest. You know I'm good for it with profits I'm building. We even been talking about you giving me another loan to buy more."

"I can't make you another loan," Riley said shakily. "Not if you're going up against DiMorra like this. And . . . I can't wait out a year to get all my money back. Not anymore. I'd like it all repaid now in the next couple days. You can forget the interest."

Blood surged in Vince's face. He brought both hands up into view. They were empty, but they were clenched into tight, heavy fists. He forced the fists down on the desk, remembering he would need the shylock's cooperation when this was over.

"I can't do it," he said heavily. "You'll have to wait the year."

Riley seemed short of breath. "You might not be around that long, Vince—if you're going against Don Angelo."

Frank spoke then without expression. "You lending your collectors to DiMorra's army, Bud?"

Riley looked at him and wet his lips. "No," he said. Which might be the truth. Or might not.

"You two go back to Angelo," Vince said, "and tell him to grow up. He likes the girl; so okay, more power to him. Don't blame him, she's pretty."

"She's not any more," Mitch said.

"So what? Is that anything to start a fight over? You know it ain't. So tell him to calm down. I don't care if he bawls Frank out or even slaps him. Maybe he deserves that. But not killing. Tell Angelo I said I'm not doing anything to him and don't intend to. I won't even call for the Commission meeting if he'll just be reasonable. Tell him I said I'll just sit here and not do anything until I hear from him again. Okay?"

Mitch studied Vince Fargo shrewdly for a moment. Then he made one last try. "You got a nice little army, Vince. But it *is* little." He held up a hand and began ticking off names on his fingers to show that they already had each one of the Fargos' real fighters pegged. "Vic Caputo, Diego Sabitini, Augie the Horse, Irish Fagin, Feigen the Jew, Polish George, Henry Shansky, Jorge Garcia, Harold Early, Smitty, and you, Tony, and Frank here. That makes thirteen. An unlucky number, Vince. And not enough."

"Enough for what? I'm not starting any war. I got too much brains for that. Tell your brother to calm it, and we can all go back to being part of one big *fratellanza* together again."

"Except for one thing," Frank stated thinly. "I'm not part of Angelo's family any more."

Vince shrugged. "Well, that's just common sense. Putting two guys that go for the same girl back together would be just asking for it."

Mitch and Riley looked at each other. They got up without another word and went out.

After the door closed behind them, Frank shook his head. "DiMorra's not stupid, Vince. You can't lull him off guard with that kind of horseshit."

Vince forced his fists open to ease his tension. "No harm in trying." He leaned back in his metal chair and rubbed his middle, making a face as a belch bubbled up. "Get me some seltzer, will you? I got a lousy case of heartburn."

Tony got back to headquarters an hour after dark with a piece of good news.

"I saw Ralph Negri. He's in with us." Tony looked at Frank. "The price is stiff. He wants five percent of that next shipment of H. And after DiMorra's out of the way, he wants you to put him in charge of all drug distributions for you. Including pills."

Frank thought about it and nodded. "I'll need somebody to do that anyway. Might as well be him. If he delivers."

"He'll deliver. I gave the number here. All he's got to do is call and let us know when and where DiMorra's open for a hit. All *we* got to do is wait."

At exactly that moment two men who didn't belong to the neighborhood were slipping into the rear of a building across the street.

TWELVE

One of them was tall and skinny. The other was almost as tall but more solidly built. One side of his face bore a long, wide scar from a knife that had slashed him from forehead to jawline. They sat on the dirty wooden floor and peered over the low window sill. They had opened the grimy window six inches at the bottom. Through it they had an unobstructed view of the front of the Fargo headquarters on the other side of Kelsey Street.

The room they were in was the top loft of a warehouse. It was dark except for the faint glow from street lights filtering in through the window. When either of the two men smoked, he shielded his cigarette so it wouldn't be spotted from outside.

The scar-faced man studied the windows of Fargo headquarters through binoculars, not lowering them until he'd examined each window. "They're being careful. Got all the shades down."

"So we'll have to wait," the thin man said. "Till he comes out." He fingered the rifle lying across his legs. It was equipped with a telescopic sight.

Each man also had a hand gun stuck in his belt, and both knew how to use them. They were professionals. That was why they'd been picked for the job.

The probability of a long wait didn't bother them. The bonus for getting Frank Regalbuto made any amount of waiting easy. And they were prepared for it. An airline bag was on the floor beside the suitcase that had held the rifle. Inside the bag were a supply of sandwiches and two thermos bottles of hot coffee.

The car they had come in was parked four blocks away.

They had strolled most of the four blocks like a couple guys just passing through. Then they had slipped into the alley behind the warehouse. There was no need to break in. They had been given a key to the back door.

A light went on in the storefront office of the Intercity Auto Repair Company across the street. The scar-faced man quickly raised the binoculars and focused them on the man who appeared inside it and started going through a file cabinet drawer. The thin man brought up the rifle, resting the barrel on the window sill as he started to take aim through the scope sight.

The scar-faced man lowered his binoculars and shook his head. "Diego Sabitini."

The thin man drew the rifle back inside as they watched Sabitini get a folder from the cabinet and sit down at the desk with it. "Working late."

"Yeah." The scar-faced man opened the zipper of the airline bag. "How about some coffee?"

"Uh-uh. Go easy on it. Might have to last us a couple days."

The scar-faced man nodded. He was twisting the top off one of the thermos bottles when the door of the loft was smashed open behind them.

He dropped the thermos and grabbed for the gun in his belt as he jerked to his knees. Beside him the thin man was already twisting around with the rifle.

A shotgun exploded deafeningly in the confines of the dark loft. Pieces of shot ripped the scar-faced man's ear apart. But it was the thin man who got most of the blast. It tore his head off, hurling chunks of brain and skull out the window. What was left of the thin man flopped against the wall and settled on the floor like nothing human.

The scar-faced man dropped his gun and threw his arms up high over his head, staying on his knees. Two men emerged from the shadows. Harold Early and Augie the Horse. Early was the one with the shotgun. Augie had a .45 automatic in one hand and a length of lead pipe in the other.

"You guys got to be out of your heads," Early said.

"Thinking you could come in this neighborhood without somebody spotting you didn't belong."

Augie swung the lead pipe.

The scar-faced man tried to ward it off with his arms. The pipe splintered his left elbow. He screamed with pain as his ruined arm dropped. He grabbed at it with his good hand. The next swing of the pipe caved in most of his teeth. He fell to the floor. This time his scream drowned in blood.

Augie kept on using the pipe.

When he was finished, no one could have told that the man on the floor had ever had a scar. One could only have assumed that he had once had a face.

An hour later Jorge Garcia turned a souped-up pickup truck into a street that ran past the front of the Majestic Freight Handling Corporation, DiMorra's city headquarters.

Garcia slowed and swung over alongside the curb in front of the building. Two bodies wrapped in plastic bags were thrown out of the back of the truck onto the sidewalk. Garcia hit the horn as he speeded away.

The truck was out of sight when the door of the Majestic Freight Handling Corporation opened. A man came out and looked at the big plastic bags on the sidewalk. He didn't have to open them. He could see what was inside them through the plastic. It took an effort not to throw up.

Angelo DiMorra stood in his den listening to the voice on the phone as Mitch, Riley, and Joe Lucci sat and watched him.

When he hung up and turned to meet their inquiring eyes, the flesh of his face was drawn, the little seams in his cheeks showing sharply, making him look old. But when he spoke, his voice was strong and controlled.

"The two boys we sent to stake out Fargo headquarters just got delivered back. On the sidewalk in front of Majestic Freight."

The other three men looked at him and didn't say anything. No one had to ask if the two were dead.

There was a timid knock on the door.

DiMorra turned his head. "It's okay," he called out.

His wife opened the door and looked in hesitantly. "The food's been ready half an hour. It ain't gonna be any good if it waits any more."

DiMorra looked at the other three men. "Go in and eat. I'll be right with you."

When he was alone in the room, DiMorra closed the door and stood there for a while, listening to the too-rapid thudding of his heart. Too much nervous tension. He didn't feel well.

Going to the liquor cabinet, he poured himself a light whiskey and water. He sat down in a comfortable wing-chair and sipped at the drink as he thought things out.

He knew he had made a bad mistake. Nobody had had the nerve to tell him so, but nobody had to. He had violated the habits of a lifetime, acting hastily in hot blood.

When you did a thing like that, you had to finish it quickly to get away with it. There might be angry words afterwards, but a done thing was a done thing. But he hadn't succeeded in getting Frank knocked off quickly, and as a result, something had been started that there was no calling back.

He didn't blame Lucci and Ralph Negri for failing in that first try at Frank. That was the sort of thing you couldn't always control when you moved too quickly. DiMorra remembered the time back in Prohibition when he, Jimmy Bruno, and Frank's father had highjacked a truckload of liquor. They'd been little more than kids then. They wouldn't have gotten any older—if Bruno hadn't accidently spotted a guy from the bootlegger they'd stolen the liquor from. He'd run a block and phoned the garage; and DiMorra and Paolo Regalbuto had managed to get out the back way before they were surrounded. Except for that they'd have been dead. An accident.

Sending those two that the Fargos had just dumped

back in front of Majestic Freight was his last try at getting it over with quickly. Now DiMorra was concentrating on the kind of struggle he was best at: one that would be won by patient planning and guile.

He was no longer angry at young Frank. It was no longer a personal matter. It was business.

He no longer felt anything for Ruby, except for a certain amount of residual obligation to make sure she was taken care of. His brief flareup of old man's passion had cooled with the consequences. It had already cost him too much in trouble.

DiMorra was under no illusion that he could end the repercussions now by simply saying he was sorry and calling it quits. It was obvious that the Fargo brothers were seizing on his mistake as a club to beat him down with.

Also, he couldn't let them get away with defying him, no matter what the rights and wrongs of the matter were. There were always too many big-headed young Turks in the organization, eager to be free of all restraints from tradition and leadership. If he let Frank and the Fargos break away, he'd have anarchy on his hands.

DiMorra finished his drink as he explored alternate tactics. His heart was still beating too rapidly, and there was a funny ache in his right leg. He rubbed the leg as he narrowed down the possible lines of action. The important thing was that he must not be put in the position of having to go to the Fargos for peace. They must be made to come to him, to acknowledge his authority, to ask once more for his friendship.

Without the protection of the Fargo brothers Frank would be left alone and helpless. When that happened, DiMorra would be willing to make a separate peace with him, if Frank would openly show himself to be reasonable. Later, perhaps as long as a year later, Frank could have an accident; something no one could prove had anything to do with DiMorra. That was no longer because of Ruby Dunne—that was over with—but because DiMorra would never be able to fully trust Frank again. The fact that this

was DiMorra's own fault did not change it: if one of them had to go down, that one would have to be Frank.

DiMorra got up and went to the phone, put through a call to Hal Johnson.

Johnson was a black mobster who ran the numbers racket in the city's predominantly black area. He paid a percentage of his take to DiMorra as proof of his allegiance and in return for high-level political and police protection.

"Hi, Mr. DiMorra." Hal Johnson's greeting over the phone sounded a little guarded. Which probably meant he'd heard about the trouble. "How're you doing?"

"I'd like you to come out to my house for a talk, Hal," DiMorra told him. "Tonight. Right now."

There was a short silence at the other end. Then, "Okay. See you in an hour." There was a click at the other end.

DiMorra put down his phone. He was sure Hal Johnson would cooperate—in exchange for a fifty-percent cut in the amount he had to pay him. And Johnson had some pretty capable boys working for him: collectors, enforcers, protection men.

But that was the second half of DiMorra's immediate strategy. The first half was to make it appear that he himself was backing away from the heat he'd churned up; making himself scarce to give it a chance to cool off. The men going against him apparently regarded him as an old Moustache Pete, past his prime, so they should swallow that.

If they did swallow it, they would be completely unprepared when Hal Johnson's boys struck at their interests. The surprise attack would have a double value: it would shake the Fargos to find that when they felt safest, they were still totally vulnerable.

DiMorra didn't care where or how Johnson hit them as long as the hit did extensive damage. It had to begin to cost the Fargos more than they could afford to defy him.

When Angelo DiMorra went into the dining room, the

others were already on their second course. As he sat down at the head of the table, his wife gave him a faint look of reproach.

He met her look without expression. "We're going down to Florida for a while," he told her. "Get packed in the morning. We'll go late afternoon."

She made a face. "It's too hot down there this time of year, Angelo. You know the heat ain't good for me."

"So stay inside the house there. That's what we got air-conditioning in it for." He looked pointedly at his empty plate.

She sighed and went into the kitchen to reheat his first course.

DiMorra looked at his brother. "I want you to come along."

Mitch didn't ask questions. He just nodded and said, "I could use the vacation."

DiMorra turned to Joe Lucci. "You, too. And Johnny Tresca and Pete Lazzatti."

Bud Riley frowned, worried. "Sounds to me like you're not leaving anybody that can handle the Fargo brothers for you."

"No," DiMorra agreed and didn't explain.

Riley cleared his throat nervously. "Some people'll figure you're . . . running away from the trouble."

DiMorra shrugged. "Let 'em think what they want. The Fargo business can wait. I'm tired. I need some time off."

It wasn't that he didn't trust Riley. But there was no percentage in telling more people than he had to what he actually had in mind.

Mitch looked behind him to make sure DiMorra's wife was still in the kitchen. "What about the girl?" he asked carefully. "You're not taking her along?"

DiMorra shook his head. "No." He looked to Lucci. "Send Ralph Negri to New York to make sure everything's taken care of for her. All the bills to me. The hospital, the apartment, anything else she needs: a nurse, plastic surgery, the works. He can tell her I had to go away on business. I'll call her when I can."

"You want Ralph to tell her where you're going?"

DiMorra hesitated a second. Then he said, "No."

His brother didn't smile. But there was sober approval and relief in his eyes.

Vince Fargo was putting down the phone when Tony came into the back office.

"That was Ralph Negri," Vince said, the softness of his voice not hiding the excitement. "Angelo DiMorra's going down to his place in Miami late tomorrow. Taking everybody with him."

Tony scowled. "That doesn't sound like him. Running out when there's trouble."

He's getting old, Tony. Too old." The more Vince considered it, the harder it was to contain his eagerness. "He figures he can let it simmer down this way. Give it time, until we relax our guard and he can make another try. Only, he don't have all that time. Not any more."

"No?"

"You kidding? This is a perfect chance to get it over with one shot. All it takes is for a bunch of us to get down there first. *He'll* be off-guard, and we'll be there waiting for him when he shows up."

Tony hesitated. He didn't like to argue with Vince. "Is that a good idea? I mean, Miami's a 'safe city.' We're not supposed to hurt each other down there."

Vince leaned back and smiled at his younger brother. "So we'll apologize. After DiMorra's dead. I don't mind apologizing all they want. It won't bring him back to life."

Tony sat down facing his brother, still worried. "Suppose it's a trick? I think Negri's being straight with us, but I can't swear to it."

Vince nodded. "I was figuring on one of us sticking here to hold down the fort, just in case. That could be you, if you want."

Tony shook his head. "No. I was down to his place there a couple years ago. Remember? I know the layout. Who do I get to take with me?"

"Whoever you want. You pick 'em. DiMorra's taking

Mitch, Lucci, Johnny Tresca, and Pete Lazzatti. His brother's nothing to worry about. The other three are."

Tony thought about it, remembering the layout of DiMorra's Miami home and fitting his planning to it. "I'll take Caputo and Sabitini, Polish George, Smitty . . . and Frank. That leave you enough?"

"Plenty. But Tony, one thing: don't miss him. You knock DiMorra off, and I can handle any heat that comes out of it. But if you try and miss, we're in real trouble."

"Don't worry," Tony said quietly. "We won't miss him."

THIRTEEN

THE FLORIDA sky that night was cloudless. A full moon cast a silvery sheen on the water and the small, jewel-like estates flanking the shore of Biscayne Bay, casting long dark shadows from the trees, bushes, and opulent, pastel mansions. It was utterly quiet, except for a few night birds and crickets and the music and laughter of a party carrying faintly across the water from a big anchored yacht.

Angelo DiMorra's ten-room Miami home was white and pink. It faced the water with a stretch of short-cropped lawn rolling down to its own private boat dock and strip of beach. The rear of the house was hidden from the narrow private road by a wall and a neatly manicured little forest of high shrubbery.

Tony Fargo sat waiting on the grass beside the carport, hidden from it by a low hedge. He looked at the luminous dial of his wristwatch. It was eleven o'clock. DiMorra was behind schedule. He should have arrived an hour and a half ago. Lowering his hand, he rested it on the grip of the

Colt Cobra stuck in the waistband of his slacks. He drew long, slow lungfuls of hot, salty night air, forcing himself to stay loose.

Frank's shadowy figure crouched beside him. He was passing his snub-nosed .38 back and forth from one hand to the other, just to be doing something. The waiting was getting on his nerves.

Caputo and Sabitini were concealed in the shadows on the other side of the carport. Caputo was armed with an automatic shotgun; Sabitini had two handguns and the knack of shooting straight with either hand. Polish George was in the bushes at the other end of the curving driveway near the gate, ready to come in from behind with his submachinegun. Smitty was inside the house, looking down from an upper window with a high-powered rifle.

It was as complete an ambush as Tony could devise. He didn't see how Angelo DiMorra could get out of it alive. Anybody with him who tried to put up any kind of resistance was going to get mowed down before he could get off a shot.

But it was getting late.

Frank turned his head and looked at him. He couldn't make out Tony's face. Just the short, dark bulk of his presence in the shadow of the hedge.

"I got a bad feeling he's not gonna show." Frank's voice was soft with a slight edge of frustration to it.

"Even if he don't," Tony whispered back evenly, "there's no harm done. All it costs us is the time it took to get down here and back."

He knew better, of course. If Ralph Negri had pulled a doublecross, they could be sitting in a trap within a trap.

But he concentrated on more likely and less lethal possibilities: DiMorra could have stopped off to see a friend on the way. He could have decided to have a late meal in Miami before coming here . . .

The sound of an approaching car put an end to conjecture. Tony drew the Colt Cobra from his waistband and snicked off the safety, slid his finger across the trigger. He

got his feet under him, staying down in the shadow of the hedge in a low crouch as he heard the car stop outside the gate. He held himself still, like a coiled spring ready to snap into action, all of him concentrating on listening.

There was the faint sound of a car door opening. Then the gate being unlocked and creaking open. Another second, then the car door slammed shut. Heavy tires crunched the gravel of the curving driveway.

A big, old-fashioned Cadillac limousine came slowly around the curve. Three men were in the front seat, but it was impossible to make out who they were in the shadows. Curtains drawn inside the rear windows concealed the occupants in the back.

The limousine stopped at the carport. One of the front doors opened. The man who climbed out was Mitch DiMorra. The man who followed him was Pete Lazzatti. Johnny Tresca got out on the driver's side.

The rear doors remained shut.

Mitch started towards the house, getting a key from his pocket. Tony hesitated, all his attention on the curtained back section of the limousine. The rear doors still hadn't opened.

Then the decision was taken out of his hands. Caputo jumped the gun, stepping out of the shadows with the shotgun trained point-blank on Mitch's stomach.

"Freeze."

Mitch froze.

Pete Lazzatti was reaching for the gun under his jacket when Sabitini emerged from the darkness beside him, a gun in each fist. Lazzatti stopped reaching and threw his hands up over his head.

Frank had already jerked upright, aiming at Tresca's head. "Hold it, Johnny!" Tresca stayed where he was, carefully spreading both hands away from his body.

Tony cursed and jumped the hedge with the Colt in his right fist. He yanked open the rear door of the limousine ready to fire into it.

Nobody was there. The back of the limousine was

empty. Tony's stomach cramped into a knot. He twisted to look back along the driveway and was relieved to see that Polish George was nowhere in sight. Which meant he was sticking to his station—and DiMorra would still be caught in an ambush if he and the others were following in a second car.

Tony twisted back to Mitch. "Where's Angelo?"

Mitch looked at him blankly and said nothing.

Tony studied him for a split second, then stepped past him, and put the muzzle of his Colt against Johnny Tresca's forehead, between his eyebrows.

"He's in the hospital!" Tresca blurted. "He got sick, just as we got to Miami. Heart attack."

"Heart attack . . ." Tony repeated it softly, testing it in his mind, studying Tresca. He decided Tresca wasn't lying. "How bad?"

"I don't know. He was unconscious when we got him there."

Tony stifled the wild hope that it might prove fatal; that he might not, after all, be way out on a shaky limb over a deep hole. "Where's his wife? And Joe Lucci?"

"With him. Pete and me're supposed to take turns with Lucci guarding him."

Mitch looked sourly at Tresca. "You're a brave boy, Johnny."

Tresca glared at him. "What's the harm in telling 'em? They can't get at him in there."

Lazzatti nodded. "He's right, Mitch. All those cops all over the hospital already."

Mitch switched his blank stare back to Tony. "This is a bad thing you tried to do, Tony. You and your brother are in for real trouble now. Better get out of here before you make it worse."

"Shut up." Tony was trying desperately to rethink things along new lines. Mitch was right. They were in trouble. If they'd killed Angelo DiMorra, there would have been heat, but they could have weathered it. Eventually, with DiMorra gone, they'd have picked up most of

the pieces. But a fluke of fate had saved DiMorra, and these three knew what they had tried—here in Miami, which was supposed to be a "safe city."

Knocking off these three now wouldn't make much sense. It wouldn't take a genius to figure out who'd done it; and the retaliation from the upper echelon of the Mafia would be remorseless.

Tony swallowed to force down the bile rising in his throat. He motioned at Mitch, Tresca, and Lazzatti with his Colt.

"Lean against the car. Both hands. Spread your feet."

Mitch was the only one who hesitated. Then he joined the other two, spreading his feet and leaning his weight on both hands against the roof of the limousine.

Tony stuck his Colt in the waistband of his slacks. "Don't do anything silly. I got another guy in the house with a rifle aimed at the three of you." He frisked them quickly, got a gun from Tresca, another from Lazzatti, nothing from Mitch. He slipped one of the guns in his pocket and held the other in his left hand, held out his right to Mitch. "The key to the house."

Mitch gave it to him.

"Let's go inside." Tony led the way. He didn't call in Smitty and Polish George, leaving them where they were just in case. Unlocking the front door, he went in and snapped on the lights. Mitch, Lazzatti, and Tresca followed him inside with Caputo, Frank, and Sabitini as their armed guard.

They entered a big, modern living room. Tony had the three captives sit together on a couch, hands on their knees. He looked at the phone. "Any other phones in the house?"

Mitch nodded. "One in the kitchen." He pointed. "And a couple upstairs in the bedrooms."

"Stay put." Tony went into the kitchen and shut the door.

He knew the situation was desperate and every passing minute made it more so. But he forced himself to act

calmly. It wasn't going to help anything to let himself get hysterical.

His first phone call was to the hospital. He asked for Angelo DiMorra and was put through to the nurse in charge of the floor his private room was on.

"I'm sorry," she told him over the phone. "Mr. DiMorra can't speak to anyone yet. Perhaps if you call back in an hour or so."

"What's his condition?"

"I'm sorry, but I can't give out that information over the phone, sir."

Tony hung up and put through a long-distance call to his brother.

Vince listened in silence as Tony quickly filled him in on how it had gone wrong.

"Maybe," Tony finished, "he'll die on his own without our help. But I wouldn't count on it. Begins to look like it's true, what they say about an old *Mafioso* being impossible to kill."

"Yeah." That seemed to be all Vince could find to say. Tony had never heard him sound so depressed.

"One thing sure, Vince. We're in hot water. Deep."

"Deeper than you think," Vince's voice growled. "Somebody just hit our construction company. With dynamite."

Tony's fingers tightened around the phone. "How bad's the damage?"

"I figure it's gonna take maybe seventy-thousand bucks to put everything back in shape. Maybe more. They wrecked the sand-and-gravel plant, most of the trucks, and a steamshovel."

"That son of a bitch."

"Yeah. That's more than we can handle, Tony. We ain't got that kind of money to spare. The insurance ain't gonna take care of half of it."

"Who did it?"

"No idea. And it don't matter. Whoever it was, the orders came from DiMorra. And I'll lay odds their orders are to keep hitting us, other places."

Tony was silent a moment. Then he said slowly, "I got an idea, Vince." He outlined it quickly. It was fairly simple.

It was Vince's turn to be silent awhile. Then, "I don't know . . ."

"You got anything better?"

"No . . ." Another pause. "Okay. We try it. Even if it don't work, it can't get us in any worse trouble than we're already in."

Tony hung up and called Frank into the kitchen. Briefly, he told him of the dynamite attack on the construction company and the new plan.

Frank thought it over, worried. Finally, he shrugged. "It can't hurt at this point. And it just *might* help."

"It better."

Tony went back to the living room and called Smitty down from the upstairs room.

Frank went out to get the car they'd come in. It was parked half a mile away. On the way back he picked up Polish George.

When they were finally all together in the living room, Tony turned to Johnny Tresca. "You're coming with me and Sabitini."

"What about us?" Pete Lazzatti asked him.

"You and Mitch go with Frank and the rest of our boys. You're gonna be hostages. If you behave yourselves and Angelo don't try anything cute, you won't be hurt."

"That's kidnapping," Mitch remarked with seeming calm. "Federal rap."

"The law's never gonna know about it," Tony said. "Not if your brother's as smart as he's supposed to be. Because if it gets to the law, you're both dead."

"Come on," Frank snapped. "Let's move." He led the way out to the Cadillac limousine. Mitch and Lazzatti followed, shepherded by Caputo, Smitty, and Polish George.

The hands of the two hostages were tied behind them, and they were blindfolded before being shoved in the back seat of the limousine. Caputo and Smitty got in back on

the jumpseats. Polish George got in front with Frank, who took the wheel.

It was going to take them an all-night ride to get home. By the time they got there, Vince would have a safe hiding place ready for them to store the hostages.

After the limousine had gone, Tony prepared to wait a full hour before leaving DiMorra's Miami home. He went back in the kitchen and made coffee for all of them to help pass the waiting. Johnny Tresca remained on the couch while Sabitini sat across the coffee table from him holding one of his .45 automatics on his knee.

As they drank the coffee, Tony explained the deal to Tresca.

"You're the lucky one, Johnny. We're letting you go."

"Thanks, Tony. I appreciate that." There was no irony in Tresca's voice. He was genuinely relieved and grateful.

"You're being let go so you can tell DiMorra what the deal is. Tell him we're holding Mitch and Lazzatti hostage to make sure he don't try anything else like the bombing of our construction company."

"I don't know anything about any bombing," Tresca said hastily.

"That don't matter. It happened. Nothing like it better happen again. Because if anybody hits us again—*anybody*—we'll know the orders came from him. And Mitch and Lazzatti will die for it. Got that?"

"Yeah." Tresca nodded nervously. "Sure. I'll tell him."

Tony studied Tresca. "How do you think he'll take it?"

"I don't know," Tresca said carefully. "He won't like it, that's for sure. He'll raise a big stink—"

"A stink I don't give a damn about. Do you figure he'll call off whoever he told to do us damage?"

Johnny Tresca thought about it carefully. "Yeah, I think so. For a while, anyway. Lazzatti, he wouldn't do it for. But he's real close to his brother. He wouldn't want to be responsible for Mitch getting killed."

Tony continued to study Tresca as he sipped the last of his coffee. A new idea was forming.

"What d'you think he'd do," Tony asked casually, "if we reversed it?"

Tresca was puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"I mean if it was you we held as a hostage and Mitch we sent to tell DiMorra about it?"

Tresca looked scared. "You kidding? What would be the point of it? He wouldn't give a damn about *me* getting knocked off. It wouldn't buy you a thing."

Tony smiled faintly. "That's what I figured. You don't get much out've being his son-in-law, the way I hear it. Except having to let your wife put horns on you. It ain't right, Johnny."

Tresca flushed and bit down hard to keep from retorting in anger.

"You'd do better with us," Tony said quietly.

"With you?" Tresca stared at him. "No offense, Tony, but you and your brother are up shit creek without a paddle right now. I guess you know that better'n me."

Tony leaned forward and put the tip of a stiffly held forefinger against Tresca's chest. "And where are *you,* Johnny, when your father-in-law pops off? A guy has a heart attack, he's on borrowed time. He could go any time, no warning. Tomorrow, next week, in a year. Then where'll you be, when Riley asks for his dough back? DiMorra gonna leave you something in his will?"

Tresca's laugh was a bitter one.

Tony nodded. "See what I mean? You'd be in better shape with us. We need you. He just tolerates you because you let his daughter get away with pissing all over you."

Tony didn't expect an answer. He could see Tresca thinking about it, and that was enough. He looked at his watch and stood up. "Time to go." He motioned for Tresca to go out to the car with him.

Sabitini followed them carrying his .45.

"Do you figure they've got the nerve to go through with it?" DiMorra demanded of Tresca. "You think they'll really kill Mitch?"

"I think so," Tresca told him slowly, considering it.

"Yeah. They'll kill him all right, if you don't lay off them. Tony said something about you having them bombed. And they know they're in bad trouble. So they're desperate."

Tresca sat in a chair beside Angelo DiMorra's bed. They were alone in the hospital room together. Lucci had gone out to the corridor with DiMorra's wife, shutting the door so they could talk in private.

Angelo DiMorra was sitting up in bed, leaning against the pillows. He looked pale and a little shaken. But otherwise well on his way to recovery from what had turned out to be a mild attack. He looked away from his son-in-law, gazing at the white wall for a time, thinking it over.

"Okay," he said slowly. "Call and tell 'em it's a deal. They don't hurt Mitch; I don't hurt them."

Tresca nodded. "If that's what you want."

"That's what I want. And after you call them, get back up home and see Riley. Tell him to take over running things till I get out in a few days. And contact the Commission. I want them to put pressure on the Fargos to let Mitch go."

"Okay." Tresca continued to study Angelo DiMorra, knowing his future and maybe his life depended on what he decided now. Finally, he said, "Another thing. They want me to go in with them. Against you. Be sort of a spy for them."

DiMorra looked at Tresca, surprise flickering briefly in his dark eyes. "You're telling me, so you've decided not to do it. How come?"

Tresca knew only honesty would go now. "You look like you're gonna be allright. If you're allright, I figure you to win in any contest with the Fargo brothers. I want to be on the winning side."

DiMorra continued to look at his son-in-law as though he'd never quite seen him for what he was. "You're smarter than I thought."

Tresca's smile was strained. It had been a difficult decision to make. "I guess that's a compliment."

DiMorra picked up the bedside phone and put through

a long-distance call to Hal Johnson. He continued to eye Tresca as he waited.

When Johnson came on, DiMorra gave it to him quickly. "Lay off the Fargos till I say different. Nothing more. Not a thing, got that?" He listened, then snapped, "I'm fine." And hung up.

"Johnny," he said, "you tell the Fargos you've decided to put in with them. Tell them . . ." He thought about it. "Tell them I'm so sick I could hardly talk. Say you don't think I'm going to make it. Right?"

"Sure. They wanted me to spy on you, so I'm gonna spy on them. For you."

"Exactly."

Tresca looked at the phone. "Only one thing, if you're going to pretend being sicker than you are. They won't trust me right off. I'd bet anything they'll have a tap on your phone here before morning. So you better watch what's said over it."

DiMorra smiled at him. "Like I said, you're smarter than I thought. We could be talking about your future, if you only had more guts."

Tresca stiffened. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"It don't look good, Johnny, the way you let Patricia get away with . . . everything."

Tresca glared at him. "That's your fault, the way you raised her. You spoiled her rotten. Never laid a finger on her. Let her figure she's got a right to do anything she wants."

DiMorra sighed. "What goes between a father and his daughter is one thing." His voice had become gentle. "Fathers spoil girls, that's the way it is. You'll find that out for yourself when you have daughters. But Johnny, between a man and his wife—that's something altogether different."

Tresca stared at him. "I thought you'd get sore if I got rough with her."

DiMorra met his stare soberly. "Did I ever say so, Johnny?"

Johnny Tresca thought about it. "No. You didn't."

He rose to his feet. Suddenly, he felt taller, lighter, stronger. And very sure of what he was going to do.

Vince Fargo was in the back office of his Kelsey Street headquarters when the phone on the desk rang. He snatched it up. "Yeah?"

"Vince?"

"Yeah. Who's this?"

"Johnny Tresca. Tony said to phone you as soon as I saw Angelo DiMorra."

"So?" Vince's meaty hand was squeezing the phone.

"So I saw him. He says okay, it's a deal. You don't hurt Mitch and Pete Lazzatti, and he don't do anything to hurt you. He called somebody, I don't know who, and told him to lay off you."

Vince didn't realize he'd been holding his breath until he relaxed and breathed out. "Okay," he said without expression. "Good. It's a deal then. Nobody gets hurt. Tell DiMorra we got a truce. Unless he breaks it."

"All right. Vince, did Tony talk to you about asking me to come in on your side?"

Vince became guarded. "No. Not yet, anyway."

"Well, I want in."

"Yeah?" The word gave away nothing. Neither belief nor disbelief.

"Yeah. On account of I don't think DiMorra's gonna be running much anymore. He's in bad shape. Real bad. I don't think he's gonna make it. If he does, he won't be half the man he used to be."

"That's too bad." Again Vince's voice gave away absolutely nothing.

"Who're you kidding? It means you'll win. And I want to be on the winning side, Vince."

"That's only natural."

"I'll give you some more news for free. He told me to have Riley take over operating his family for a while. And he wants me to ask the commission to put pressure on you. To let Mitch go."

"So do it. No skin off my ass."

"I figure I'd better, or he'll get suspicious I'm throwing in with your side." Tresca hesitated. "*Am* I in with you, Vince?"

"I don't know . . . You staying down there or coming home?"

"Coming home."

"So phone me tomorrow, and I'll let you know. After I talk it over with Tony."

The phone rang again five minutes after Vince hung up. It was another call from Miami. This time from Sabitini.

"Tony's on his way home, Vince. Before he went, he asked me to get a reliable guy down here to put a tap on the phone in DiMorra's hospital room."

"Damn good idea."

"The tap just went on. And we already got our first piece of news on it. The doctor was using it, calling for an oxygen tent for DiMorra. Seems like he's in bad shape. The doctor was saying not to let any calls come into DiMorra direct, because he's not well enough to take them. And the doctor ordered private nurses for him around the clock."

"Beautiful." Vince was not surprised to hear the trembling in his voice.

"Can I come home now? I told this guy to phone you if anything else interesting comes through."

"Yeah. Jesus, I feel like a guy that fell in a sewer and came up smelling roses."

Sabitini laughed and hung up.

Vince put down the phone and wiped beads of sweat from his reddend face. He needed something for his stomach, badly. But he was smiling for the first time in twenty-four hours.

It sounded like Tresca was telling the truth after all.

FOURTEEN

PATRICIA TRESCA was all over the man on the bed, working on him determinedly with everything she had: teeth, lips, tongue, fingers, breasts, and wildly-swinging glossy black hair. He was weary from the last two times but beginning to respond through the tiredness in spite of himself. He couldn't very well help it. She was doing everything she knew; and she knew a lot.

The word around was that Angelo DiMorra's daughter was a nymphomaniac. That was debatable. But she was unquestionably a sexual aggressor. And she never lacked for victims. At twenty-four Patricia had a cute little-girl face and the kind of slimly curved, leggy, sinuous figure that was made for a hotpants outfit. Stripped for action she was even more of a turn-on; all squirmy smoothness and impudently flaring softness and prehensile legs. But the man she was currently working over had had enough of it.

His name was Ray Noland. His job was running a string of high-class call girls for Marie Orlando. Right now he wished he'd stuck to them for diversion. The thing about call girls was that they were all good actresses and had very little real sexual hunger of their own. So they could be counted on to deliver exactly what a guy wanted without demanding superhuman performance in return.

He groaned as her skillful fingers caressed and tugged.

Like what Patricia Tresca was trying to get out of him now, by nibbling her way up and down his tired flesh. "Cut it out, Patty. Give it a rest for an hour, will you? Let's have a couple drinks . . ."

She raised her head with a pout. "No more liquor for you. That's the trouble, you've already had too much." Suddenly, she scrambled over him and sat down full on his chest, grinned down into his face wickedly. "I know what you need: some pot." Still sitting on his chest, she leaned over to get a joint from a jeweled box open on her bedside table.

The sound of the apartment door opening and closing came from the direction of the living room.

Fright contorted Noland's features. "Jesus Christ . . ." He struggled to sit up.

Patricia fell off his chest onto the mussed sheets and shoved up on one elbow with an irritated look. "Don't get scared, nothing to worry about." She looked toward the living room and called out evenly, "Johnny, if that's you, don't come in here. I'm busy."

Noland scrambled off the bed and grabbed for his slacks.

Johnny Tresca strolled into his bedroom and looked at his wife with a face like a dark piece of carved wood.

Ray Noland backed against the wall holding the slacks in front of him. "Johnny," he bleated, "this isn't what it looks like—"

Tresca laughed and looked at him with eyes that made Noland cringe.

"I couldn't help it, Johnny!" Noland babbled. "It was her that—"

"Shut up, Ray," Patricia snapped. "I told you there's nothing to worry about. Johnny's a very understanding husband." She smiled insolently at Tresca. "Aren't you, dear?"

"Go in the bathroom and get dressed," Tresca told Noland quietly. "Shut the door. Stay there till I tell you to come out."

"Sure. Right, Johnny. Anything you say." Noland grabbed up his clothes and shoes and dashed into the bathroom. When the door slammed shut behind him, Johnny Tresca looked at his wife again.

The insolent smile was still on her face as she reached out again to get a joint from the jeweled box. She made no effort to cover her nakedness, flaunting it at him.

He walked over to the bed and hit her. It was an open-handed slap, and his palm struck the side of her face with a sound like a gunshot. It knocked her off the bed and dumped her on the rug.

She sat up quickly, clapping a hand to her reddened cheek, her face a mask of fury and pain. "You sonuva-bitch! I warned you never to do that! Daddy will—"

"Daddy isn't going to do a goddamn thing," he snarled. He walked over and seized a fistful of her hair, yanked her up.

She came to her feet with a howl, clutching with both hands at her agonized scalp. Tresca drew back his right fist and punched her in the stomach. She dropped to her knees, gagging and clutching at herself, bending forward until her forehead touched the floor. Tresca kicked her in the hip, hard. She screamed and rolled over on the floor. Desperately, she lurched to her feet with tears streaming down her face. He caught her by a wrist and spun her to face him, punched her in the eye. She bounced off the wall, and he hit her in the other eye.

She fell to her hands and knees and tried to crawl away from him. He bent and grabbed her ankle, yanked her back to him.

"Don't, Johnny!" she sobbed. "Please don't . . ."

He flung her over on her back and straddled her, sitting down with all his weight on her breasts and pinning her wrists to the floor with his shoes. Then he began slapping her face.

He slapped her slowly and methodically, using both hands and not holding back, rocking her head from side to side on the floor. Her screams became choking sobs; her pleas for mercy became unintelligible whimperings.

Tresca kept it up for a full ten minutes. Then he got up and went to the bathroom door and knocked. "You can come out now."

There was no response from inside. Tresca opened the door and looked in. Ray Noland was sitting, fully dressed, on the toilet, staring back at him fearfully.

"Get out," Tresca snapped at him. "I'm not gonna hit you. Not this time. You get together with her again, and I'll do more than hit you."

"I won't, Johnny," Noland swore shakily. He got his feet under him and came out of the bathroom sideways, still cringing. He shot a look at Patricia.

She was curled on her side on the floor, sobbing brokenly. Both eyes were swollen almost shut. The sides of her face were swelling, purplish bruises.

Noland fled from the apartment.

Tresca walked back to his wife and kicked her in the side. She sprawled over on her back limply, unable to even make an effort to defend herself.

Tresca looked down at her with a glow of satisfaction. "This was nothing, baby. The *next* time I catch you putting horns on me, I'm going to knock out every goddamn one of your teeth."

Four hours later, The Accountant phoned Vince Fargo and passed on what Ray Noland had told him.

"I don't like it, Vince. Noland says Tresca beat the crap out of her. That makes it pretty plain he doesn't give a damn how DiMorra takes it. And Tresca's no use to us if DiMorra catches on that he's jumped sides."

"That's for sure," Vince growled into the phone. "That stupid son of a bitch!"

"There's only one way I can see that he can maybe get away with it. He's got to act as though he's sorry and try like hell to make up with her. You know, play it like he's only human, so he lost control of himself; but he swears he'll never do it again."

"Good idea. I'm seeing Ralph Negri in an hour. I'll have him pass the word to Tresca. It should work, if he can make like he's scared shitless by what he did, now that he's cooled down."

"It better work." The Accountant paused and then asked, "How are the hostages?"

"Tucked away nice and safe."

"Anything further from your man in Miami?"

"He's still got the phone tapped. And from what he's hearing, DiMorra's still the same. Critical. No improvement."

The Accountant didn't try to conceal his glee. "That's good news."

"Yeah. Bad for him, good for us. When's the Commission representative due?"

"Tomorrow afternoon. They're boiling mad, Vince."

"Well, I figured they would be. Just do your stuff, and we'll be okay."

"I'll do the best I can. Just don't get sore if I say some things against you. Remember, I've got to make it seem as though I'm impartial."

"Sure. Just don't let yourself get carried away with it."

The meeting with the emissary from the Mafia's upper echelon, Ben Cardiello, took place on "neutral" ground: The Accountant's den at the Starlite Motel. The Accountant acted as chairman, with Cardiello, a dignified, impressive man of seventy who was frequently used as an arbitrator, seated beside him. Frank and the Fargo brothers sat on one side of them. Bud Riley, representing DiMorra, sat on the other side.

"The important thing to remember," he pointed out to Cardiello, "is that they're holding Mitch DiMorra and Pete Lazzatti somewhere. And they've threatened to kill them. Let them get away with that, and none of the old dons anywhere are going to be safe from young hotheads in their own territories."

"Angelo DiMorra started it," Frank grated. "He killed my uncle, and he's been trying to kill me. For no good reason. *That's* the thing to remember."

"We're talking about *now*," Riley snapped. "Right now the problem is you kidnapped Mitch and Lazzatti. In

Miami. Going against everything everybody's always agreed to."

The Accountant nodded solemnly. "It's a bad thing, no question. A very bad thing they did."

"It'll be worse than a bad thing," Riley said stiffly, "if it turns out those two men are already dead."

"They're alive," Vince Fargo stated tonelessly. "So far."

Ben Cardiello, the emissary from the Commission, spoke up softly. He hadn't said much so far, letting the angry ones get it off their chests. "They better stay that way," he told Vince.

"They will, if Angelo DiMorra doesn't try to pull something on us again. If he does, they're gonna die; nothing anybody can do about it."

Cardiello gave him a look of mild reproof. "You know better than that, Vince. The boys could get mad enough to put out an open contract on all of you. For say, ten g's."

There was a heavy silence in the den, as everyone absorbed the seriousness of what Cardiello had said. An open contract from the national leaders of the Mafia would mean that anybody at all at any time could make the try at killing Vince, Tony, or Frank. Whoever pulled it off would, in addition to the ten-thousand-dollar reward, earn the gratitude and protection of the biggest men in the organization.

The Accountant cleared his throat, breaking the silence. "That's pretty drastic talk, Ben. I'm as upset as anybody by the seriousness of what they've done. But in all fairness I think we have to give some thought to the provocation. There doesn't seem to be any question but that Angelo did start it."

Riley looked at him as though he'd been personally betrayed. "Are you saying they're *justified* in what they did?"

"You know I'm not saying that," The Accountant chided. "All I'm interested in is getting peace in this city, so it can be run for the profit of all. We all want an end to this

senseless violence that threatens us great harm. And we cannot deny that Angelo did start it when his men shot down Vito Riccobono, a valued old man who wouldn't have hurt a fly."

"That was an accident!" Riley snapped.

"Trying to kill me was no accident," Frank pointed out thinly. "He's tried twice so far. For personal revenge, no other reason."

The Accountant nodded and looked at Cardiello. "That's true. I don't know what you think about Vince and Tony trying to protect Frank from these attempts, but I have to admit I think their motivation was a good one."

Cardiello appeared to consider this but said nothing.

"We did it to prevent bloodshed," Tony said heavily. "And what did we get for it? DiMorra blows up our construction outfit with dynamite! Anybody claim *that's* a right thing to do?"

"We're here to talk about Mitch and Lazzatti!" Riley shouted, losing his temper. "They've got to be released, safe, before we can talk about anything else."

"They ain't gonna be," Vince stated flatly, "until we get some guarantees from DiMorra."

Cardiello looked at him quickly. "What sort of guarantees do you want?"

"Wait a minute," Riley cried. "Are you on *their* side?"

"I'm not on anybody's side," Cardiello said in that mild voice. "Like Orlando said, we're all here to negotiate a settlement that'll bring peace to this city. So everybody can go on doing business." He looked at Vince again. "What guarantees?"

"Three things," Vince said. "First, there's got to be no more attempts to knock off Frank or attack what belongs to me and Tony. Second, DiMorra's got to let Frank join me and Tony and bring his narcotics business with him. Third, DiMorra's got to pay us for the damage to our construction company."

Cardiello looked at Riley. "Are you willing to take those terms to Don Angelo?"

Riley looked unhappy. "I can't. He's in no condition to talk yet. He's in an oxygen tent. In a coma. You've got to consider that."

Cardiello did consider it. The theories of power were one thing; the realities were something different. And if Angelo DiMorra was that sick . . .

"But he gave you the job of running his family for him meanwhile, right?" he demanded of Riley. "That means you have the authority to speak for him here?"

Riley hesitated. "Yeah, I guess so."

"No guessing. Do you have the authority to make a deal in his name or not?"

Riley squirmed. "I can't agree for him to pay for what happened to their construction company. I don't know that he even had anything to do with it."

"The hell you don't!" Tony snarled. "He ordered it done, and you know he did!"

The Accountant held up a hand to silence him and looked at Vince. "Would you be willing to put compensation for the damages aside for a time, until Angelo DiMorra can discuss it personally?"

Vince thought about it, weighing the cost of the damage against the profits to be had from Frank's narcotics trade. Finally, he said, "If I get the other two guarantees, yeah."

Cardiello looked again at Riley. "Will you agree to guarantee those first two points in DiMorra's name? I'll tell you my own feeling for what it's worth. I think you should take it."

Riley knew a final pronouncement when he heard it. "Okay. We'll go along with it."

Vince looked him in the eyes. "Frank joins us and no more attacks on any of us from DiMorra's people. Right?"

Riley nodded slowly. "If you let Mitch go. And Lazzatti. That's the important thing to me."

Vince and Tony looked at each other. There was no need to discuss it in private. They were gaining a lot and losing very little. If DiMorra was dying, his whole operation was going to be up for grabs anyway. If he lived, they would have both Negri and Tresca in DiMorra's camp—to

help set him up for another hit; and the next one wouldn't miss. Either way they would win.

Tony looked to Frank, inquiringly.

Frank shrugged. "If that's what you want, I'll go along with it."

Vince turned back to Cardiello.

"It's a deal."

Mitch and Lazzatti were put out of the car still blindfolded. They'd been that way ever since leaving Miami, and they had no idea where they'd been kept. Otherwise, they hadn't been harmed. And they'd been fed regularly.

They waited until the sound of the car died away. Then they removed their blindfolds and stood there blinking at each other until their eyes adjusted to the fitful light of a street lamp on the corner.

They found themselves on the sidewalk of a narrow, deserted city street. But they weren't sure it was their own home city until they'd walked two blocks and read the street sign of a main thoroughfare. Another block further on, they hailed a passing cab.

An hour later the cab brought them to the walled country estate. A local cop and a DiMorra button man were on guard at the gate. They recognized Mitch and Lazzatti and passed them through.

Bud Riley was standing on the steps of the porch, waiting for them. He shook their hands fervently. "Thank the good Lord you're both safe."

"Yeah," Lazzatti agreed emphatically.

"Where's the Don?" Mitch asked.

All pleasure left Riley. "Still in the hospital in Miami."

Mitch frowned. "How is he?"

"Not good, Mitch, I'm sorry to tell you. I just phoned there. He's got nurses around the clock now. The one on now said he's taken a turn for the worse."

Mitch felt a heaviness descend on him. His shoulders sagged.

Lazzatti looked at Mitch and Riley grimly. "I need a drink. Bad." He started into the house.

He stopped as he heard an unusual sound. Turning, he saw both Mitch and Riley looking skyward, puzzled. Lazzatti raised his eyes.

A small seaplane was circling above the estate, under a scattering of low clouds. It swung down smoothly and skimmed the dark surface of the lake, settling lower in the water as it slowed. It came toward the dock below the terrace.

The propellers stopped spinning, and the plane coasted the rest of the way, stopping inches from the dock. A man jumped out of the front and used a boatline to secure the plane to the dock. Then he opened the passenger door and pulled down a short gangplank.

Joe Lucci came down the gangplank. Followed by Angelo DiMorra.

Mitch, Riley, and Lazzatti reached the shore end of the dock at the same time as Angelo DiMorra and Joe Lucci. Mitch threw his arms around his brother and wept.

Riley could only stare. "You shouldn't have done that to me, Angelo. I thought you were . . ." He couldn't finish it.

"I'm fine," DiMorra told him. "Just fine."

He didn't look as though that were completely true. He still looked a bit drawn and shrunken. But his voice was as strong as ever. And as quietly sure.

"Let's get in the house. We got a lot of fast planning to get done."

Mitch pulled away from his brother, wiped his eyes. "What are you figuring to do?"

"Do? I'm going to hit those bastards before they get wise. With everything I've got."

Pete Lazzatti gave a low laugh. "They're sure in for a surprise. They think you're still down there in that hospital."

Angelo DiMorra smiled. It was not a nice smile to see.

"They'll know I'm here," he said. "It's the last thing they'll ever know."

FIFTEEN

VINCE FARGO was having a big midday meal in his home together with Frank Regalbuto and Irish Fagin, when the phone call from Johnny Tresca came through.

Vince's wife Nella was heaping the plates with a liberal second helping of linguini with white clams, and Vince had already started shoveling it in, enjoying the luxury of being able to eat at home again. Not that the Fargos and their troops had totally relaxed their guard. Frank was sticking to the Kelsey Street area for a few more days, just in case some punk with a gun hadn't yet heard the word that DiMorra's contract on him had been called off. And Irish Fagin was acting as Vince's bodyguard outside the Fargo headquarters. But most of the Fargo operations were already back to normal activity. Diego Sabitini was out with Victor Caputo getting the overdue collections from the garages and used-car lots.

When the phone rang, Vince shoved away from the table and picked it up. He listened briefly and looked at his wife. Nella left the room without a word so he could talk business freely. He never liked to involve her in what was going on.

Johnny Tresca sounded excited and full of himself on the phone. Vince didn't blame him, when he heard what Tresca had.

"I was in Zutti's Club, having a couple beers when Sam Zutti himself came in. The place was empty, and we got to talking. He's worried about how he stands now. On account of the word's already around town about DiMorra being a goner almost for sure down there in Miami. So I

get it out of him until I'm sure how he feels, and then I slip him the word—"

"Get to the point," Vince growled, but he already guessed it and was getting excited himself.

"The point is, Vince, Zutti's ready to switch to you with his whole set-up. Figures you'll wind up running things, so he wants in on the ground floor. How d'you like that, man?"

"You did good," Vince acknowledged.

Sam Zutti, in addition to his profitable nightclub, also ran one of the biggest policy banks in the city with a solid take every single day.

"Of course," Tresca went on, "he ain't gonna make no arrangements with *me*. Naturally, he wants to talk to the *capo* himself. That's you."

"He there?"

"Yeah. I'm calling from his office. He's out at the bar."

"Put him on."

"Okay. Hold it."

Vince waited eagerly, grinning at Frank and Irish Fagin but not answering the curiosity in their faces.

Zutti came on the phone sounding very nervous, which was only natural. "I think maybe Johnny jumped the gun a little, Vince. I'm not saying definite till I talk it over with you and Tony and Frank. I mean, if you're the guys that're gonna be running things, I got a right to hear straight from you what the deal is. Like, can you give me the same protection I used to get from DiMorra? And for how much? If I swing over to you now, I don't think I ought to have to pay as much as I was paying DiMorra. That's fair, ain't it?"

"We can talk about it," Vince said. "Why don't you come over to my office on Kelsey Street, and we'll lay it all out for you?"

"I'm not coming over *there*," Zutti bleated. "DiMorra's boys could still be watching the area. They see me there, and they'll know what I'm doing. I ain't ready to let *anybody* know till it's all set up and I know I got protection.

Suppose you come over to my club? There's no customers around right now and—"

"No good," Vince cut in. He wasn't about to take that kind of chance. But he could understand Zutti not wanting to take chances either. He thought of a couple possible neutral meeting places. "I'll tell you what, Sam. You know Benny's Diner on Marion Street?"

"I think so."

Vince gave him the exact address. "Meet you there. In . . . say, an hour. Okay?"

Zutti hesitated. "What about your brother and Frank Regalbuto? I make a deal, I want to be sure the three of you agree on it, Vince."

"We'll be there," Vince told him flatly. "One hour. Exactly."

He hung up and looked at Frank and Irish Fagin. "Anybody know where Tony is?"

Irish Fagin shook his head. "Ain't seen him since last night."

Frank said, "He told me he figured it was time he got himself a girl and did some all-out relaxing." He grinned. "I guess he's still relaxing."

Vince sighed and shook his head. "That kid brother of mine . . ." But he didn't really disapprove. Tony was a funny kind of guy. When things got uptight, most guys could relax it a little with a woman. But not Tony. He had to wait till the squeeze was off. So if he spent a little more time at it than most when he finally got down to it, he was entitled. It would be all right. Sam Zutti knew he could speak for Tony.

Quickly, Vince filled them in on the phone talk.

Irish Fagin laughed with pleasure. "Zutti's only the first, Vince. You'll see, they'll all be flocking to you fast as they can now."

But Frank looked a touch worried. "Could be a trap—couldn't it?"

"With DiMorra in a coma inside an oxygen tent?" Vince shook his head. "Mitch is running the DiMorra

family now, and he ain't got the guts to go against a Commission agreement and start any shooting war on his own. But," he added, "that don't mean that we don't take any precautions."

He looked at Irish Fagin. "Get over to Benny's Diner. Right now. Hang around. If something smells, call me at the office. If you don't call, I'll call you there about five minutes before we're due. Got that?"

Irish Fagin nodded, washed down a last forkful of linguini with some red wine, and hurried out of the house.

"Let's go pick up a car," Vince told Frank and headed out to his headquarters. "And maybe another one of the boys."

"We've got an hour," Frank said as he followed.

"Uh-uh. I want to get there fifteen minutes ahead of time."

The blue Buick sedan Vince chose pulled out of Ryan's Garage twenty minutes later. Frank was driving. Vince was in front with him. Henry Shansky was in the back seat. They were all wearing guns. In addition, Shansky had a pump-action shotgun across his knees, fully loaded and covered with a blanket.

Irish Fagin sat at the counter in Benny's Diner on Marion Street taking his time with a chocolate soda with vanilla ice cream. The diner couldn't have been more peaceful. The four booths behind him were empty. The only other customer at the counter was a runty cab driver with thick glasses who'd just come in for a cup of coffee and slice of apple pie. Benny, a big plump man with practically no hair, was behind the counter in his dirty apron, washing the lunchtime dishes.

When the phone rang, Benny picked it up and said, "Benny's Diner, but we ain't taking no more send-out orders until—" He stopped talking and listened, then looked at Fagin and the cab driver. "One of you named Fagin?"

The cab driver shook his head and put another forkful

of pie in his mouth. Fagin held out a thick hand. Benny put the phone on the counter and gave him the receiver.

Irish Fagin put it to his face and said, "Yeah . . . No. All clear . . . Positive . . ." He hung up and shoved the phone back across the counter.

The cab driver washed down the last of his pie with the last of his coffee and got off his stool. "You got a john in here?" he asked Benny.

Benny pointed to a door inside the last booth. "But leave it clean as you find it. Right?"

"A clean toilet in a greasy spoon," the cab driver said. "That's a real discovery." He went into the toilet and shut the door.

The front door of the diner opened. Irish Fagin glanced toward it casually. And then not so casually. The man who stepped in was Joe Lucci.

Irish Fagin spun off the stool with his right hand diving inside his jacket to tug out the gun holstered under his left armpit.

The cab driver came out of the toilet behind him and blew a hole in his back with a .45 government model Colt automatic. Irish Fagin fell forward across two of the bar-stools. Both of them spun wildly as he toppled off and thudded to the floor on his back, his arms outflung.

Joe Lucci took out a long-barreled .38, leaned down, and put the muzzle against Irish Fagin's temple and squeezed the trigger. It didn't make as much of a noise as the .45, but it made sure the job was finished. The thumb and first two fingers of Irish Fagin's left hand twitched once; and that was all.

Benny put both hands flat on the counter and leaned hard to keep himself from falling down as he made a whimpering sound.

Lucci motioned with the .38. "Get in the john."

Benny rushed out from behind the counter and into the toilet.

"Stay in there an hour," the cab driver told him and shut the door on him.

* * *

A couple minutes later the blue Buick reached the corner of Marion Street, half a block from Benny's Diner. It was a one-way street. Vince studied the length of it.

It looked clear. In spite of that, Vince said, "Circle around a couple blocks." Just to be sure.

Frank nodded and drove on past Marion Street. At the next corner he turned left. In the back seat Henry Shansky had both hands under the blanket now. He thumbed off the safety of the shotgun with his left hand. The forefinger of his right hand was already across the trigger.

They made a complete circuit of the streets surrounding the block containing Benny's Diner. Vince's narrowed eyes took in everything along the way. He didn't really expect to see anything sinister, and he didn't.

When they reached the right end of Marion Street again, Vince said, "Okay."

Frank turned the car into Marion Street, heading for the diner. Vince turned his head and told Shansky, "You go in first. If everything's kosher, come out with Irish and keep watch while me and Frank go inside."

Shansky was nodding when Frank snapped, "Vince!"

Vince jerked his head back to see a truck backing out of a wide alley at the other end of the block. It was backing straight across the street, cutting off the way out.

"Get out of here!" Vince snarled at Frank. He already had a snub-nosed revolver in his fist.

Frank brought the Buick to a jolting stop and threw it into reverse.

A heavy limousine suddenly screeched around the corner behind them and skidded to a halt sideways in the middle of the street, blocking their retreat. Guns blasted from its open side windows. Shansky ducked as the glass of the Buick's rear window exploded inward. Vince felt a bullet rip his cheek as Frank brought the Buick to another jolting halt and threw it into forward gear again.

The unthinking speed of Frank's reactions startled him. It was as though each split second was stretched to give him time in the midst of flying death. Across the street from Benny's Diner was an open-front shop with its vege-

table and fruit carts extending out onto the sidewalk. Frank twisted the wheel hard toward it and jammed his foot all the way down on the accelerator. The Buick shot across the street.

A man stepped around the hood of the truck with a submachine gun and let go a stuttering barrage of slugs. The remaining windows of the Buick shattered. Something hot burned across the front of Frank's chest. He ground his teeth together and kept the gas pedal flat to the floor, vaguely aware of Vince firing out the side window; not aware at all of the machinegunner falling to his knees.

The wheels of the Buick hit the curb and jumped it. The car bounded across the sidewalk, knocked aside two vegetable carts, and crashed head on into two more, smashing them inside the open-front shop before slewing to a stop.

A hail of bullets was clanging into the Buick from three sides: from the limousine, from the machinegunner now firing from his knees, from Joe Lucci and the man dressed as a cab driver.

Henry Shansky managed to get off two booming blasts with the shotgun at the limousine, momentarily silencing the guns inside it. Then a steel-jacketed machinegun slug broke the top of his skull wide open.

Vince, with blood streaming from his ripped cheek, shoved open his car door and came out triggering three shots in rapid succession at the machinegunner. The bullets hammered the machinegunner off his knees and dropped him face down against the front wheel of the truck. Then the guns of Lucci and the cab driver centered in on him. A slug smashed his right shoulder apart. He fell on the sidewalk with a scream of pain, dropping his gun. He screamed again in rage as his left hand groped for the gun.

Frank was out of the Buick, the front of his ripped shirt dark with blood from his bullet-grazed chest. He leaned against the car, raising his snub-nosed .38 to aim at the two figures across the street. Lucci spotted it and threw himself down in the gutter. The cab driver didn't move fast enough. Two of Frank's slugs caught him full in the

chest and kicked him backward through the diner's big front window. He fell inside in a shower of jagged plate glass.

Bullets fired from the limousine spanged off the metal of the Buick inches from Frank's face and stomach. He dodged deeper into the security of the wrecked vegetable-and-fruit shop. The owner was in the rear, crawling out a back door into an alley. Frank ducked down behind a fruit stand and looked back at the street out front.

Two gunmen came out of the limousine and approached on the run. There had been four gunmen inside the car; but one had had his arm shattered by Shansky's first shotgun blast, and another's throat had been torn out by the second blast.

Vince was on his knees on the sidewalk, his gun in his left hand and his right arm dangling like a bloody rag. He began crawling toward Frank. Bullets whined at him from the running gunmen, from Joe Lucci across the street. Slugs tore into his side, his hip, his right leg. He sprawled face down across a litter of bananas, pears, and oranges.

Frank snapped a shot in Lucci's direction. Lucci's answering shot sliced the sleeve of his jacket. Frank turned and sprinted for the rear of the shop in a crouch, vanished through the back door into the alley.

Vince lay on the sidewalk, half inside the shop. It was hard for him to coordinate, but he no longer felt any pain. And the gun was still clamped in his left fist. Laboriously, he rolled deeper inside the shop. His lifeblood was pouring out of the openings in his cheek, his shoulder, side, hip, and leg. His meaty face was clenched as hard as stone and shiny with sweat. Using the elbow and leg that would still respond to his command, he pushed against an inner wall, shoved himsef up until he was sitting on the floor with his back braced against the wall.

He raised the gun in his left hand and waited. He had to work hard at it to hold his eyes open. His lips were drawn back wide open, baring the clenched teeth through which his breath gasped.

The gunmen from the limousine darted in, swinging their guns around as they tried to spot him fast. Vince's first shot got the lead one in the back of the neck. He missed the other one with his second shot, but it was enough to make him jump back onto the sidewalk out of sight.

Joe Lucci dove headfirst inside the shop. He hit the floor with his left shoulder and side, instantly rolling away under a fruit stand.

Vince fired at him. But his vision was blurring, and his arm wobbled. His bullet missed. Lucci's did not. It broke Vince's jaw and snapped the back of his head against the wall. Lucci's next bullet made a small dark hole in the middle of Vince's left eyebrow.

Joe Lucci got to his feet. Vince Fargo was still sitting against the wall. But his thick torso sagged forward, and his head hung down between his legs.

Lucci walked over and put the muzzle of his gun against the base of Vincent Fargo's skull and fired the final bullet into him.

It was less than five minutes later that a young car thief named Sheldon Greenberg drove a brand-new canary yelloy Plymouth into Ryan's Garage and Auto Repair. Word of what had happened had not reached the Fargo Kelsey Street headquarters yet, and the car was the only thing on Smitty's mind as he strolled over to Greenberg.

"Pretty nice," he said as Greenberg jumped out of it. "Outside, anyway. Bring her over under the light and let's have a look at the engine."

"You do it," Greenberg blurted. "I got to get to the john, bad. Got the runs."

Smitty laughed as he watched the way the young car thief sprinted out the rear of the garage in the direction of the toilet. He wouldn't have laughed if he'd been able to see Greenberg keep running, past the toilet, out of the yard, and on down the street.

Smitty got behind the wheel and drove the yellow Plym-

outh over under the big hanging lamp. He got out, strolled around to the front of the stolen car, and opened the hood.

The explosion of the seven dynamite sticks wired to the hood was heard blocks away, smashed windows across the street, and completely destroyed almost all the heavy, expensive auto-repair equipment inside the garage. All that was ever found of Smitty was the heel of one shoe and a short section of shoulder blade with scorched flesh adhering to it.

Victor Caputo came out of an auto repair shop on the east edge of the city. He was carrying a suitcase already half filled with money they'd collected from the places they'd covered so far. Diego Sabitini followed him with a hand on the gun in his right-hand pocket and his eyes swiftly scanning the street.

He yelled a warning the instant he saw the car bearing down on them. But Caputo didn't react fast enough; he turned and stared as the car jumped the curb and came at him across the sidewalk. Sabitini had jumped back into the protection of the doorway. Caputo was trying to do the same when the car smashed head on into him, flinging him high into the air ahead of it.

The suitcase, ripped from Caputo's hand, struck a lamp post and broke open, raining bills of various denominations all over the place. Caputo's broken body bounced off a building wall and thudded down across the curb.

The right wheels of the car crunched over his chest and neck as it swung back onto the street, still going full tilt.

Sabitini sidestepped out of the doorway and got off two shots at the car as it sped away. He hit the car both times but didn't get anyone inside it. Before he could get off a third shot, the car was screeching around the corner and out of sight.

Ralph Negri was stretched out naked on top of the big bed in his apartment, still asleep, when the door chimes

rang. He'd gotten drunk the night before with a girl he'd been trying to make for two months; so drunk that by the time she was finally ready, he was not. It had been six in the morning when he'd gotten back, and he'd been in such bad shape by then that he'd barely managed to strip off his clothes before passing out.

In spite of that, Negri came instantly awake, one hand automatically finding the gun on the bedside table even before he got his eyes unstuck. He came off the bed and stood there a few seconds, fighting off a wave of dizziness. The chimes sounded again.

Ralph Negri made his way into his living room. "Who's that?" he called through the door.

"Pete Lazzatti. Open up, damnit! I been trying to get you on the phone. Come on, Ralph! There's trouble you 'n' me got to take care of fast."

Negri's wariness gave way to worry: it wasn't good for his reputation if it got around he was too drunk to even hear the phone . . .

"Hold on," he mumbled. "Be right with you."

"Hurry it up, we got to get going," Lazzatti called back.

Negri hurried through his bedroom, putting the gun on the bureau as he went past into the bathroom for his robe. He got into it as he hurried back to the living room. He was painfully thin and didn't like being seen without clothes on. Lazzatti was ringing the chimes again as he reached the door.

"Ralph, what the hell's the matter? Open up!"

"I am. Don't get in an uproar." Negri unlocked the door.

The door slammed in on him so hard it struck him in the face and chest and knocked him backward across the living room. He tripped over his ankles and fell in the middle of the rug.

Lazzatti came in with a gun in his hand, trained down at him.

Negri came up on his elbows, gaping at Lazzatti. "What the . . ."

His voice trailed off as two men came in behind Lazzat-

ti. They were both collectors for Bud Riley; big, heavy men who specialized in breaking the legs of debtors who claimed they couldn't pay what they owed the loanshark. The last one in shut the door and locked it.

Ralph Negri scrambled to his feet and lurched for the bedroom to get his gun. Pete Lazzatti clipped him across the back of the head with the barrel of his gun. Not hard; just hard enough to explode pain in Negri's skull and drop him back to the rug. Before he could get up again, the two collectors were sitting on him, one of them holding his arms behind him while the other closed his mouth with wide strips of adhesive tape.

He struggled to get out from under them. But he was a frail man, and their combined weight pinned him like a bug to the floor, squeezing the breath out of him.

When the gag was finished, the other collector used more tape to bind his wrists tightly behind him. Then they flopped him over on his back.

Negri tried to scream for help. All that came through the adhesive tape across his mouth was a small, high-pitched whine that couldn't be heard outside the apartment. It was cut off entirely when one of the collectors sat down on his chest, forcing the air from his lungs, and put thick hands around his neck. The other collector got down on the floor and seized both his ankles, forcing his legs wide apart. Lazzatti put away his gun, bent down, and flipped Negri's robe open. Then he straightened, looking down contemptuously.

"You slimy piece of shit," Lazzatti grated. "A guy like you, thinking he could get away with trying to knife Don Angelo in the back!"

Negri's eyes bugged up at him, pleading. Lazzatti's face met that look with no more response than a slab of wood. He took a switchblade knife from his pocket and pressed the button. The long razor-sharp blade flashed out. Lazzatti bent toward Negri again.

Strong thumbs pushed into Negri's throat, strangling the bubbling scream that tried to get past the gag. In spite of the weight on him and the power of the hands holding his

ankles apart, Ralph Negri's whole body bucked upward wildly as Lazzatti slashed at his groin. His eyes rolled up in their sockets and then dropped shut. His body went limp.

The collector who was on his chest got off. "Fainted." He knelt and ripped off the gag, used both hands to pry Negri's teeth wide apart. Lazzatti stuffed what was left of Negri's manhood into his mouth and left it there. Then he put the point of the knife to Negri's neck, just below the earlobe, and pushed it in deep, carefully cutting Negri's throat wide open from ear to ear.

He had to jump back a little to get away from the blood. When it stopped spurting, he bent close again and drove the blade into the dead man's stomach. He used the end of Negri's robe to wipe the handle to get rid of his fingerprints. Leaving the knife sticking out of Negri's middle, he went to the bathroom and washed his hands.

When they went out, they left the apartment door open. Angelo DiMorra wanted Ralph Negri found this way. He wanted everyone to know.

An open enemy should be allowed to die quickly with as much dignity as possible.

But the death of a traitor must shame his memory.

Angelo DiMorra was pacing the den of his country home like a cage-irritated panther as his brother got the last piece of news on the phone.

Mitch hung up and turned with a tight smile. "Ralph Negri," he said tonelessly and didn't have to explain further. "I call it a pretty damn good day's score, Angie. Vince Fargo, Negri, Caputo, Shansky, Smitty—"

"It's not good *enough*," Angelo DiMorra cut in heavily. He stopped his pacing and looked at Mitch. "Where the hell is Vince Fargo's kid brother?"

SIXTEEN

TONY FARGO, leaning against the padded headboard of the big bed in the best room at the Starlite Motel, smoked a cigarette as a naked eighteen-year-old blonde with amazingly ripe breasts crouched at his feet and licked his toes.

He watched her impassively as he sucked smoke into his lungs. She glanced up and saw she wasn't getting results. Getting to her knees, she straddled his legs and bent forward. She began moving her shoulders. Her dangling breasts swung back and forth, softly caressing his thighs and groin.

Tony blew out a stream of smoke. "You might as well quit. I think I've had enough."

She studied him professionally, looked up at his face. "Maybe if I roll us a couple more joints?"

He considered it. "No. I had enough of that, too."

"Want to try another girl? How about Sandra? She's Spanish. Black hair; be a change from blond."

Tony shook his head. "Had her last night."

He'd been in this room for twelve hours, and he'd had three of Marie Orlando's best whores with a lot of good sound sleep between. Most of it had been what the doctor ordered. It had drained the long-held-in tension out of him, leaving him deliciously limp and untroubled. But now a familiar feeling he didn't like was creeping back. A feeling of not wanting to be touched, of being dirty. He needed a hot bath followed by a cold shower. And then to get out of here and be by himself until he felt clean. After that go home to Vince and Nella and the kids.

Tony crushed out the stub of his cigarette and swung off the bed. "Go get me something to eat," he told the

blonde. "Four fried eggs, sunnyside up. A lot of crisp bacon. A pot of coffee, strong and black."

"Okay, Tony." She got off the bed as he went into the bathroom to fill the tub.

As the blonde went to the door, it opened. Frank Regalbuto stepped in. She fell back with a gasp as she saw the wild look on his face, the dried blood crusting his ripped shirt.

He jerked a thumb at her. "Get out."

She slid past him into the corridor outside. Frank was shutting the door when Tony came out of the bathroom, wrapping a towel around his middle. He stopped dead when he saw Frank.

"What's happened?"

Frank didn't answer immediately. He had difficulty meeting Tony's eyes. Spotting a half-full bottle of Scotch, he picked it up, twisted the cap off, and took several long swallows. He gasped, went over, and slumped down into an easy chair, still holding the bottle in both hands. Then he told Tony what had happened.

Tony moved sideways until his knee touched the end of the bed. He lowered himself until he was sitting on it. His face had gone blank. The shock was more than he could grasp right away. He tried to think about Vince not being alive and found he couldn't.

The door burst open. The Accountant came in with his wife. They looked scared to death. The Accountant shut the door and leaned against it, almost panting with fear. Marie Orlando looked at Frank and Tony.

"Angelo DiMorra's back!" she told them in a voice that shook. "He wasn't sick; it was all a trick! He booby-trapped us!"

The Accountant's nod was a mechanical jerking of his head. "He just phoned. Asking if I'd seen you, Tony. He's spreading the word all over the city. Everybody's out hunting both of you . . ."

Tony's face remained blank. His eyes seemed to be focussed on nothing.

"What did you tell him?" Frank demanded.

The Accountant wiped his wet forehead frantically. "I told him I'd let him know if I heard anything about you. I said I haven't seen either of you. But you've got to get out of here. If he finds out you were here and I didn't tell him—"

Marie glared at her husband. "He'll find out all right, you stupid bastard. The girls all know they're here. You know there's no way to make them keep their mouths shut forever. Sooner or later one of them'll talk about it, and DiMorra'll kill us both."

Terror made The Accountant think fast. "I can tell him they were both here when he called, but they had guns on me. I can phone him as soon as they leave and explain that was why I had to lie to him."

Marie liked it right off. "That might do it. Yeah . . . why shouldn't he believe it?" She turned back to Tony and Frank. "But you've got to get away from here. Right now!"

Frank looked at her coldly. "You're in this with us. Like it or not."

"Sure, Frank," The Accountant agreed hastily. "But I can't do any good for any of us if DiMorra knows that. If he doesn't know it, I can still help—with the Commission, anyway."

Frank considered this and stood up, putting the bottle aside. "Okay. But first I got to do something about this rip across my chest. And I need a fresh shirt and jacket."

The Accountant nodded anxiously and opened the door. "We got all you need right here. In my rooms."

Marie Orlando looked at Tony. He was still sitting on the end of the bed, staring at the wall.

"Tony," she said hoarsely, "did you hear us? You've got to get dressed and get out of here. Right now."

He turned his head slowly and looked at her. "You get out," he said without moving his lips.

She found herself recoiling from the flat deadliness of his eyes.

"Come on, Marie," The Accountant urged nervously. "Give him a chance to pull himself together."

She went out without looking at Tony again. Her hus-

band followed her. Frank paused with his hand on the doorknob.

"Tony . . . you okay?"

"Don't worry," Tony said tonelessly, as though reciting from something he was reading without completely understanding it. "I'll be fine."

"Then you'd better get dressed. They're right; DiMorra's sure to find out about us being here."

"I want something to eat first," Tony said in that same dead voice. "Four eggs, sunnyside up. Crisp bacon. A lot of black coffee, strong."

"I'll get it." Frank went out and shut the door.

Tony continued to sit on the end of the bed for a while, still feeling numb. But his brain was starting to work again.

He stood up and went to the phone, told the switchboard his number at home. A woman answered. She sounded like she'd been crying, but it wasn't Nella.

"Who is this?" Tony asked.

"Annie, Nella's sister. Is this Tony?"

"Yeah. Nella already heard about . . . Vince?"

"Yes. That's why I'm here." She began to sob.

"Stop that," Tony ordered firmly but without anger. "You're no good to her if you're gonna keep bawling. How is she?"

"Calmer now. I gave her some pills I use to help me get to sleep. Sedatives."

Tony thought about asking to speak to Nella but decided he wasn't ready to handle it yet. "How are the kids taking it?"

"They don't know yet. I mean, they know *something's* happened. But they don't know that . . . their father . . ."

Tony spoke quickly to stop her from crying again. "Tell Nella I'm all right, but maybe I won't be able to be in touch with her for a while. Tell her not to worry, she'll be okay and so will the kids. Tell her—" He paused to think of the right words. "Say I love her and the kids, and I'll be with them soon as things settle down."

"Okay, Tony. Do you think it's safe for them to stay here?"

"Perfectly safe. DiMorra wouldn't touch them."

He hung up. Thinking about Nella and the kids without Vince started other crazy thoughts that he didn't care to examine too closely. Firmly sealing them off in a part of his mind unconnected with his conscious thought processes, he placed the next call: to Ralph Negri.

A man whose voice he didn't know picked up the phone at the other end and said, "Hello, who's this?"

"Who're you?" Tony countered.

"A friend of Ralph's."

"Yeah? Where's Ralph?"

"Taking a bath. If you'll tell me who this is, I'll ask him if he wants to come out and talk to you."

"Sure," Tony said and hung up.

He knew a cop's voice when he heard it. So Negri was dead, too.

He put through a call to the Kelsey Street headquarters.

Augie the Horse answered the phone. "Tony, am I glad to hear *you're* still around! You . . . know about Vince?"

"Yeah. Anything else?"

"A lot else," Augie said heavily. He filled Tony in on the bombing of the garage, the deaths of Smitty and Caputo. "What the hell's going on, Tony? I thought with DiMorra dying—"

"He's not," Tony told him. "It was a booby trap. He suckered us and slipped back to start a war."

"A war? That ain't what I call it, losing Vince and four of our best guys inside a couple hours. That's a massacre."

"You sound scared."

"Well, sure, I'm scared. The way they're going, they'll knock us all off in a couple days."

"Not if they can't find us." Tony paused and added softly, "If you want out, say so now."

There was no hesitation at the other end. "You know I'm with you all the way, Tony." Augie the Horse sounded hurt.

"That's good," Tony told him, "because anybody that quits on me I'm going to kill. No matter how long it takes, I'll kill him. Pass that around."

"Ah, come on, Tony. We got no finks in this bunch."

Tony knew that to be true. But he also knew that unless he could show that the Fargo organization was still alive—and quickly—they would eventually begin drifting to the winning side.

"Augie, remember the place we used a couple years ago, when we had the state cops hunting for us?"

"Sure. Out in—"

"Don't say it," Tony snapped. "The phone could be tapped. Get hold of the guys we got left. Make the calls from outside. Get them all out there. Tell 'em to make sure nobody tails them. And we're going to need all the guns and ammo you can get your hands on."

"What about here? We just leave the place empty?"

"That's right."

"For how long?"

"As long as it takes."

It was getting dark out when the phones began ringing in the home of Hal Johnson, king of the numbers racket in the city's black ghetto. Johnson's home was the entire top floor of the best hotel in the ghetto. There were a lot of rooms, and most of them had phones. The big room that had been refurnished as his office had two on separate lines. Both began ringing at the same time. Johnson picked up one of them. His nephew, who was also his chief lieutenant, picked up the other.

What Johnson heard on his phone suffused his strong face with murderous fury. His biggest numbers bank had just been invaded by two armed white men. They had shot his best accountant dead and made off with twenty thousand betting slips and over fourteen thousand dollars.

Johnson slammed the phone down and saw his nephew holding the other phone and looking at him anxiously.

"Hal—it's Tony Fargo . . ."

Hal Johnson blinked. He forced himself to calm down as he reached for the phone, thinking fast. He drew a deep breath and spoke with a controlled, casual voice. "Hello, Tony. How're things?"

"Picking up. But for you I hear it's going down. Too bad about that fourteen thousand bucks."

"You son of a bitch!" Johnson exploded. "You're gonna wind up dead for that!"

"You'll have to find me first," Tony told him quietly. "And while you're looking, you know how many of your policy banks and numbers runners can get knocked over? Unless you stop supplying DiMorra with troops. Declare yourself neutral for the duration."

Johnson simmered down fast but kept his voice angry. "What the hell're you talking about? Who says I'm not neutral?"

"Sam Zutti."

Johnson felt a faint chill. "Zutti?"

"Uh-huh. The guy that suckered my brother into that ambush. I had a little talk with him a couple hours ago."

Johnson was silent for a moment. Then he said, "I want that fourteen thousand back, Tony."

"No. We'll call it a partial payment for what you did to the Fargo Construction Company. I'll forget the rest of it if you stay off DiMorra's side. If you don't . . . You got a good business, Hal; but it's too vulnerable. Stick with DiMorra and it'll cost you more than you can afford. Butt out and after he goes down, you won't have to give away part of your take to him anymore."

"I don't know why Zutti would tell you things like that," Johnson said carefully. "Because none of it's true. I got no interest in DiMorra's war. None at all."

"That's good. Because if you change your mind, you could end up losing more than your money and your business. Go down and take a look inside a black panel truck parked outside your hotel. You'll see what I mean."

Tony Fargo hung up.

The panel truck was in front of a no parking sign. A cop had already stuck a violation ticket under its windshield wiper. Hal Johnson opened its back door. There was something on the floor, covered by a rubber sheet.

Johnson climbed inside and flipped back the sheet.

His stomach churned and sour bile rose through his constricted throat and flooded his mouth.

There was the naked torso of a man. The arms and legs and head had been chopped off with an ax. Each of the limbs had been hacked into three pieces. In his rush to get out, Johnson kicked the head.

It bounced in the street and rolled against the curb with the silently screaming mouth and bulging eyes turned upward.

The head had once been a part of Sam Zutti.

Joe Green sat in his office on the top floor of his dress factory and sweated as he counted the money across the desk to Dave Lewis. Eight hundred dollars. Five of that was Green's weekly repayment on the loan from Bud Riley. The other three was the weekly interest.

Dave Lewis was the smallest of Riley's collectors. The big ones came around when you didn't pay on time.

"I had to borrow from my son-in-law to make this payment," Green told Lewis. "Business is so bad. Everybody knows it."

Lewis nodded as he recounted the money himself. "Sure. That's why the banks wouldn't lend to you." He stood up and pocketed the money. "See you next week."

"I don't see how I can get that much up next week," Green pleaded hoarsely. "Tell Riley he's got to let me go for a month. The new season starts then. Business'll pick up . . ."

"That'd double your interest," Lewis pointed out.

"I know," Green said miserably. "What else can I do?"

"Okay, I'll ask Riley, see what he says." It wasn't a bad deal. If Green couldn't pay, he'd be given the choice of

getting busted apart or turning over a major share in his business to a silent partner: Riley. "I'll let you know tomorrow."

Lewis left Green's office and shut the door. The building was dark and silent. The employees had long since left for the night. The open-cage elevator was still at the top floor with the door open as Lewis had left it. He got in and started to turn to close the door.

Jorge Garcia stepped in behind him. He clamped one hand over Lewis' mouth, and his other hand drove the long blade of a knife expertly between Lewis' ribs.

Lewis' cry was muffled by Garcia's hand. He turned as his knees buckled under him. Garcia yanked the knife out of his back and drove it into his stomach, ripping upward with a strong twist of the wrist. Lewis spilled to the floor of the open elevator. Garcia squatted beside him and put the point of the knife between two ribs, just over the heart. He pushed the blade all the way in, getting his weight behind it.

Drawing it out, he wiped the blade clean on Lewis' sleeve. He shut the knife and put it away. Then he got the eight hundred dollars from Lewis' pocket and stuck it in his own. He went through the rest of Lewis' pockets and found another wad of four hundred, plus two hundred and fifty in his wallet. Standing up, Garcia pocketed this, too. Then he went across the corridor and opened the door of Green's office.

Green was still behind his desk, pouring bourbon into a water glass.

"Phone Riley," Garcia told him. "Tell him there's a present for him in your elevator. In memory of Vince Fargo."

Garcia shut the door and ran down the steps out of the building.

Johnny Tresca came to slowly, not opening his eyes right away. The first thing he was aware of was that the back of his head ached. And then that he lay naked on

cold ground on his back; spreadeagled with his wrists and ankles tied to stakes. He began remembering: the phone call from Mitch, warning him to get out of the apartment; that the Fargo gang was already striking back and until they were found, it wasn't safe to be out in the city alone anymore. The garage under his apartment building. Opening the door of his car. Something striking his head from behind . . .

A hand slapped the side of his face, hard. "Wake up, Johnny."

His eyes snapped open. He lay in a clearing in a woods somewhere. Above him were overhanging trees and a clouded night sky. Tony Fargo squatted on one side of him, Frank Regalbuto on the other. He could see their faces in the light of a lantern set on the grass.

"Hey . . ." His voice was weak, sounded like a rusty hinge. "What is this?"

"What this is," Tony Fargo said, "is that you double-crossed us, Johnny."

"You tried to set me up for a kill," Frank said.

"You got Vince killed," Tony said. "And Irish Fagin. And Henry Shansky."

"That's a lie!" Tresca croaked, straining uselessly against the ropes holding his wrists and ankles stretched out on the grass. "It's not true! That wasn't my fault, I swear it!"

Frank slapped him. "I was there, Johnny. When you suckered Vince with that phone call. When the bastards you had waiting shot him down in the street like a dog."

"You know what happens to doublecrossers?" Tony asked softly.

"I couldn't help it! They made me do it! They found out I was on your side! They were going to kill me!"

"That's what *we're* going to do." Tony picked up a full bottle of wine.

"Wait, listen to me, I can be more help than ever to you now!" Words poured out of Tresca, inspired. "DiMorra *really* trusts me now. You can never get at him inside that

country place of his. He's got all those guards and cops . . . But I could tell him I found you both and killed you. He'll figure it's safe to come out then . . ."

"He'd never believe you," Frank said. "Nobody believes a doublecrossing, squealing pig."

Tony very carefully twisted the cork from the wine bottle and tossed it away. He tilted the full bottle. Drops fell on Tresca's bare chest.

He screamed with pain.

There was no wine in the bottle. It was all sulphuric acid. Wisps of smoke came from the tiny dark holes in Johnny Tresca's skin.

"Don't!" he shrieked. "Please! I can help you . . ." His shrieking became unintelligible as Tony sprinkled more drops up and down his twisting, heaving torso.

The bottle was one-quarter empty when Tresca fainted. Frank opened a small bottle of ammonia and held it under his nose, slapped his cheek with the back of his free hand. Tresca's nostrils twitched; his eyes snapped open.

Tony sprinkled acid on his face, drops hitting his eyes. Tresca opened his mouth wide and howled in agony. Frank picked up a funnel and jammed it between his teeth, down into his throat. Tresca frantically jerked his head from side to side in an effort to dislodge it. But Frank seized his ears and held his head still.

Tony tipped the bottle and poured the rest of the contents into the funnel.

That was the start of that night. Before it was over, three bowling alleys and two restaurants owned by Angelo DiMorra had been consumed by fires started with Molotov cocktails. Four of his big trailer trucks had been demolished by dynamite. Two of his bookies had been blown apart by repeating shotguns as they had a drink in a bar. And another collector had been found dead, strangled with piano wire in his bed.

SEVENTEEN

AT SEVEN in the morning Angelo DiMorra went into one of the bathrooms on the ground floor of his country house and swallowed a tiny nitroglycerin pill. Then he sat down on the toilet and waited until the painful thudding of his heart subsided. His stomach was bothering him, too. The doctor had warned him he needed to eat a full breakfast. But all he'd been able to choke down was coffee.

He stood up and looked at himself in the medicine cabinet mirror. The dark circles under his eyes from a sleepless night frightened him. But no fright showed on his face as he left the bathroom.

Joe Lucci was in the living room on the phone. He quickly covered the mouthpiece with his hand when he saw DiMorra. "It's Ruby Dunne again," he informed DiMorra quietly. "She's crying."

"I'm out," DiMorra said and walked on toward his den.

He felt no irony in the fact that he no longer had the faintest interest in the girl who had triggered this war. He knew better than to believe she was the cause of it. The real cause was younger men hungering to unseat him so they could move up. Without Ruby Dunne they would have sooner or later found another excuse to make the try. Better to get it over with now.

Mitch, Riley, and Lazzatti were waiting for him in the den. Along with Lou (The Accountant) Orlando. Mitch was just hanging up the phone. He looked at his brother grimly.

"Angie, they found Johnny. Stuck in a garbage can on Summer Street. They used acid on him. All over. Inside, too."

Angelo DiMorra went around his desk and sat down in the leather swivel chair. If he felt anything about the horrible death of his son-in-law, it didn't show on his hard face.

"It only requires the finding of two men to be finished with this trouble. Antonio Fargo and Francesco Regalbuto. They have to be hiding somewhere in the city or very close to it. Find them. Kill them. Two men."

"I spread the word last night," Pete Lazzatti said. "Today everybody in your family will be out looking. Cruising the streets, asking questions. We'll find them."

Angelo DiMorra looked at his brother. "The phone taps?"

Mitch nodded. "The Fargo home. The Regalbuto home. The families of the rest of them."

"They can't keep coming out of hiding to hit you like this without somebody spotting them sooner or later," The Accountant said. "I've got all of my people on the lookout, too."

Angelo DiMorra looked at The Accountant. "It would give me special pleasure if you found them. Then I would know I could trust you again."

The Accountant flushed. "I told you, Don Angelo, they had guns on me when you phoned—"

"You told me," Angelo DiMorra agreed. "If *you* deliver them, I will know I can believe you."

The Accountant opened his mouth to protest. Instead, he said heavily, "I'll do my best, you can be sure of that."

DiMorra continued to study him with cold dark eyes until Riley spoke. "While we're hunting them, why not hit them in the pocketbook, like they've been hitting us. There's their garages, the used-car lots . . ."

DiMorra had already considered this approach and rejected it in his mind. But out of courtesy he allowed Riley to watch him think it over before pronouncing his decision. "No. Our soldiers are already stretched too thin, guarding our own places and searching for our enemies. For each place of theirs that I could hit, I have ten that they could strike at. We have to concentrate on preventing

further damage to ourselves until those two are done away with."

Lucci had come in during this. Hesitantly, he said, "It might help, Don Angelo, if you let word get out about a reward. Our own people will help out of friendship for you, of course. But for people who are not part of our thing, money could buy a lot of extra help."

DiMorra looked at his bodyguard with a faint smile. "Are you getting so you can read my mind?"

Lucci almost blushed. "Well, I've been around you a long time."

DiMorra's smile faded as he scanned their faces. "Five thousand dollars to anyone who leads us to Fargo. The same amount for Frank Regalbuto. One thousand for each of their men. Ten thousand to whoever *kills* either of the two leaders. Two thousand for each of their followers."

Pete Lazzatti whistled softly. "That's pretty heavy."

DiMorra nodded. "But it will buy the cooperation of the people."

"No question," The Accountant agreed solemnly. "Your enemies are dead men, Don Angelo."

"Unless they leave the state," Mitch said.

"Even so, I will track them down." Angelo DiMorra looked at his brother. "You will be in charge of directing the search for them from the city. From the office of my freight company. Once you get there, do not come out again until it is over. It won't be safe. And keep enough men with you at all times there and in the nearest buildings, to prevent any attack on you."

"I'd bet on one thing," Riley said. "Keep up the pressure and some of those boys with Fargo are going to start putting out feelers to switch to us. What about that?"

"Any one of them who wishes to come to me will receive my gratitude and protection forever," DiMorra answered. "I will take them in my arms and cherish them. But," he added slowly, "not Fargo and Regalbuto. For them there is no turning away from what they have started."

He leaned back in his chair and pronounced, in the ac-

cents of his Sicilian youth, the words by which Mafia dons had sent death to many men over many decades, "Take these stones from my shoe."

For two days nothing happened. Absolutely nothing.

Mitch DiMorra had moved into the building containing the Majestic Freight Handling Corporation and turned it into an armed fortress. Men came and went. Phone calls were made and received. A number of leads developed. Each turned out to be frustratingly false.

It seemed impossible that there should not be one single solid lead to the Fargo gang, considering the vast numbers of people looking for them. This included the police, for the word was out that the Fargo gang was no longer under any kind of political protection and was responsible for all of the sudden outbreak of carnage and property destruction.

But for two days no one saw any member of the Fargo gang. No one heard from them or came up with a whisper about where they might be. And for two days they made no strikes at the DiMorra family or businesses. It was as though they had fallen into a hole, and it had closed over them without a trace.

Late on the evening of the second day Frank Regalbuto stood waiting next to his car off a seldom-used country road sixteen miles outside the city. When another car appeared, coming along the road from the direction of the highway, Frank stayed where he was. It was the first car he'd seen in the thirty-five minutes he had been waiting.

The car pulled over beside Frank's. Two men got out. They were both short, stocky, hard-bitten, middle-aged men. One of them was Dominic Russo, a cousin of Frank's mother. The other was Joe Saltis, Nella Fargo's uncle. Russo managed a cheap whorehouse in the redlight district for the Bruno family. Saltis had been an enforcer for the DiMorra family but was semiretired because of arthritis.

They shook hands with Frank, and the three of them sat down on the grass and waited.

Five minutes later Tony Fargo emerged from the bushes behind them. He put down the rifle he was carrying and sat on the grass with them.

They talked quietly for almost an hour. When they got up, they embraced each other warmly.

"We'll be ready when you call," Russo said.

Saltis nodded. "I have a feeling others will follow. For too long Angelo DiMorra has kept too much of the pie for himself."

"Just make sure you have the two men we need ready, too," Tony said.

"The sewer thing is no problem," Saltis told him. "I have a distant relative who works for the Sanitation Department. He's not in the business, but he will get the information we want as a favor to me."

"The dynamite expert should be easy, too," Russo said. "There are a number of good men in that line of work."

"We need one we can depend on," Frank pointed out.

Russo smiled. "But not for long. With a gun at his back he'll be dependable for the couple hours we need him."

Saltis and Russo got back into their car and drove off in the direction of the highway. Tony and Frank waited a few minutes. Then they got in their car and drove off in the opposite direction.

It was dark when they pulled into the parking area beside a roadside diner. They didn't get out. After a few moments of nervous waiting, hands on their guns, Polish George came out of the bushes beside the parking area.

He got in the back seat. "It's okay. He came ten minutes ago. Alone."

Tony put his gun down on his lap and looked at his watch. "Three minutes to go."

Three minutes later, on the dot, The Accountant came out of the roadside diner. He glanced around anxiously before hurrying over and climbing in back with Polish George.

His face was taut with fear. "I shouldn't have come. If DiMorra ever finds out I met with you—"

Tony cut him short. "We need the dough you promised. Now."

Frank nodded. "I put through a call to Genoa. My father's friend has the stuff there ready. But I've got to come up with the rest of the payment for it. I can't get it out of my bank. DiMorra's bound to have men watching for me there."

The Accountant thought about DiMorra and tried to control his trembling. "Maybe you'd better let it wait. Until after this trouble is over . . ."

"We can't," Tony growled. "We need more men to stand against DiMorra much longer, and we've got to pay to get them. When that stuff gets here from Italy, we'll have more than enough. And you'll be rich."

Greed and fear of DiMorra struggled within The Accountant. "I don't know—"

"You promised it," Tony reminded him softly.

The Accountant looked into Tony Fargo's eyes and quickly looked away as a new fear squeezed his guts.

"All right," he said faintly.

"Tomorrow morning," Frank said.

The Accountant felt very tired. "All right," he repeated numbly.

Russo and Saltis were hungry by the time they returned to the city that night. They stopped at a seafood restaurant and had an excellent, leisurely meal. As they were going back out to their car, a young hood passed them going in.

Russo stopped on the sidewalk and looked back at the restaurant. "Wasn't that Billy Rio?"

Saltis nodded. "One of DiMorra's new pistols. Young punk."

They got in their car and looked at each other.

"What do you think?" Russo asked, his eyes eager.

Saltis thought about it. "I don't know." He got out of the car and strolled back across the sidewalk, peeked in through the glass in the restaurant door.

When he got back in the car, he said, "He's at the first table. It'd be easy. And nobody in there that knows us."

Russo smiled. "So why not?" He reached back and drew a sawed-off shotgun from under a blanket on the back seat. Saltis unlocked the glove compartment and got out a .32 target pistol.

Billy Rio had just finished ordering his meal and was lighting a cigarette as he settled down to wait for it, when Russo and Saltis came in the door. They didn't have to come in far. Two steps and then they let go at Rio with the pistol and shotgun.

He went halfway across the table before it overturned and dumped him to the floor with it. A woman began screaming. But nobody made a move to go over and look at the dead hoodlum until Russo and Saltis were back in their car and driving away.

None of the descriptions given by the witnesses enabled anybody to identify the killers. All that those most concerned could get from the descriptions was that both killers were too old to be any of the known surviving members of the Fargo gang.

Which was the first hint anybody had that other discontented men were beginning to trickle over to the Fargo side.

Nothing else happened for another day.

The word came out again from Angelo DiMorra's country stronghold: find them.

The Fargo gang seemed to be making it a war of nerves now. But DiMorra didn't change his tactics, even though they hadn't worked yet. It was the first sign that he *was* getting old.

Nobody saw Frank Regalbuto that night as he drove to the next nearest city with an international airport and took a plane to Italy.

But the next day a petty thief named Sidney Franklyn spotted Diego Sabitini and Feigen the Jew.

Franklyn was temporarily down on his luck. He had lost on the horses and also lost his nerve to pull a robbery without working himself up to it for a long time. That was

why he found himself living in a little room over his sister's diner just outside the city. And working as a dishwasher there to pay for the room and meals.

He was rubbing soothing lotion into his sorely chapped hands that afternoon, when he glanced through the small window in the swinging door that divided the kitchen from the dining area. And saw Sabitini and Feigen sitting at the counter, eating.

Franklyn's heart lurched, and he dodged back quickly so they wouldn't spot him in turn. He stood there beside the steaming tubful of dirty dishes and thought fast.

He thought about money. His first temptation was to hurry to the phone in back and call DiMorra headquarters in the city. The reward for leading the DiMorra boys to two of the Fargo gang would be two thousand dollars. Which was one hell of a lot of money in Franklyn's present condition.

But it shrank to very little compared to what he could wind up with if he found where the whole Fargo gang was hiding.

Steeling himself to go for the big money, Franklyn stripped off his apron and went into his sister's living room in back of the diner. From its side window he could look through the curtains at the parking area.

It was a very long wait. Almost twenty minutes. Then Sabitini and Feigen appeared. They got into their car and drove down the road, going east.

Franklyn rushed out to his second-hand Ford, which was still his only because the finance company hadn't caught up with him. Pulling out of the parking area, he sped east along the road until he spotted the Fargo car up ahead. Then he slowed, allowing a good stretch of road and two cars between him and them.

He followed them onto the state highway and then off it to another road, always getting further from the city. When they finally turned off onto a narrow farm road, he slowed even more, giving them plenty of time before cutting in after them.

They were no longer in sight by then. Franklyn drove a

bit faster along the twisting road, until he glimpsed the car ahead again. Then he slowed, keeping it barely in sight.

The car ahead turned off the narrow road onto a dirt path through a wild, heavily wooded area. Franklyn drove past the dirt path for a hundred yards before pulling off the road. He climbed out and walked into the woods.

What he was doing scared him more than any robbery he had ever pulled. But he kept thinking about a fantastic possibility: five thousand dollars for Tony Fargo. Another five for Frank Regalbuto. Another thousand for each of their gang. The total, if his information led to all of them, would come to a staggering amount: sixteen thousand dollars!

He kept going until he could see the dirt path. Then he followed it, sticking to the cover of bushes and trees.

Suddenly he stopped, crouching low and straining to listen. He heard it again: footsteps coming his way. With his heart pounding, Franklyn lowered himself to the ground, crawled under a tangle of bushes, and lay flat. The footsteps came nearer. He put his face down in the dirt, gritting his teeth to still his breathing.

The footsteps went past him, crunching dry leaves and twigs. The slow stride did not pause. It went on. Franklyn listened hard until he could no longer hear the footsteps. Then he got up on his hands and knees, his chest heaving with terror.

He wanted to get out of there. But he kept thinking: sixteen thousand dollars . . .

He crawled on through the bushes, came to a stop when he found himself peering out of them into a small clearing alongside a narrow stream. There was a crude two-story clapboard house in the clearing, facing the water. It didn't look like it had been occupied for years. And there was nobody in sight. But the car he had been following was parked behind the house, next to two other cars.

The front screen door of the house creaked open. Franklyn ducked lower, watching as a short, thick-bodied man came out onto the porch. It looked like Tony Fargo. He stretched and looked around. Franklyn squinted to

make out his face more clearly, watching him sit down on an old rocking chair and light a cigarette.

Franklyn was sure now. It was Tony Fargo.

Squirming backwards through the bushes until he could no longer see the clearing or the house, Franklyn got to his feet and plunged towards the road. His car was still there. No one was in sight around it. He jumped in, did a tight U-turn, and raced back toward the city.

EIGHTEEN

THEY CAME at night. Fifteen men in three cars. Joe Lucci rode in the first car, Pete Lazzatti in the last one. In addition to the handguns worn by all fifteen men, each carried either a rifle or a submachinegun. The three cars pulled off the narrow farm road shortly after entering it, a good distance from the dirt path leading to the Fargo hideout. Climbing out of the cars, the fifteen men made their way quietly along the road.

They moved warily, like soldiers on a dangerous patrol should, alert for ambush. Lucci led half of them in single file along one side of the road, keeping to the dark shadows of the trees; Lazzatti led the other half along the other side. Each man held his weapon up, ready, finger across the trigger.

When they reached the dirt path cutting through the woods to the hideout, Lucci and Lazzatti paused to confer in whispers. Lucci led his men into the bushes on one side of the path. Lazzatti headed into the bushes on the other side of the path, followed by his line of men.

Hidden in the bushes on the other side of the road,

Tony Fargo watched them go with narrowed, glittering eyes. He gripped a pump-action shotgun with both hands. It had been a long wait; but it was going to be worth it.

He had been right to go with Feigen's certainty that he and Sabitini had been followed back to the hideout. And now he knew he'd also been right not to clear out immediately.

When the last of the DiMorra troops had vanished in the direction of the hideout, Tony looked at the luminous dial of his watch. He waited five minutes and then rose to his feet. Behind him the members of the Fargo gang began getting to their feet. Two had rifles; but the other four had shotguns, the best weapon for close work in the darkness, when you couldn't get a clear target.

Russo and Saltis came up to Tony with a frightened little man called Shorty; an old con who'd spent half his life in prison for blowing up safes and vaults. Tony nodded toward the road. Russo led the way, lugging a heavy suitcase as he headed in the direction the DiMorra men had come from. Shorty followed him obediently, carrying another suitcase. Saltis brought up the rear, carrying his target pistol in his hand.

Tony waited another minute. Then he went across the road into the woods on the right side of the dirt path. His men followed in single file: Feigen, Polish George, Jorge Garcia, Harold Early, Sabitini, and Augie the Horse.

Lucci and Lazzatti came out of the woods into the moonlit clearing at the same time on opposite sides of the path. They stepped into the open cautiously, ready to fire their rifles, swiftly scanning the area around the clapboard house.

No one was in sight. There were no lights on inside the house, no sounds of anyone inhabiting it, and no cars parked out back as Franklyn had reported. Nothing.

Still, they took no chances. Lazzatti motioned to two of the men. They moved out, keeping to the woods, circling

the clearing in opposite directions. Lucci and Lazzatti hunkered down in the concealing shadows of the trees with the rest of the men, watching and waiting.

Fifteen minutes went by. Then the two scouting the encircling woods stepped out into the clearing, raising their rifles to signal that they'd found no one. Lucci and Lazzatti looked at each other grimly, thinking the same thing. But still they took no chances. Lucci sprinted into the clearing, circling toward the front of the house, crouching low to present an elusive target in the night shadows. Half the armed DiMorra soldiers sprinted after him. The other half ran crouched toward the rear of the house, following Lazzatti. No one fired at them.

Lucci was the first to reach the house. He went up onto the porch with one of his men. The others fanned out in front, aiming at the dark windows. Raising one foot, Lucci rammed his heel against the door, kicking it open. He went in with it, dropping to the floor inside and rolling fast, ready to fire back at any gunflash. The other man did the same. Nothing happened. No one was there.

Lucci rose to his feet as he heard the back door being kicked in. Moving quickly through the dark, empty house, he met Lazzatti and another man. Lazzatti shook his head angrily. Lucci looked at the inner stairway. They raced up it together. There was no one on the second floor either.

Lazzatti lowered his rifle disgustedly. "I knew it! I told you we should've got right out here soon as Franklyn came in with it."

Lucci shrugged unhappily. "Mitch said to wait for dark."

"Well, Mitch was wrong. They tumbled and got the hell out. We missed 'em."

"Yeah." Lucci couldn't think of anything else to say at this point. He trudged back down the steps and out of the house.

With no one around to fight, they took the path on the way back.

* * *

Tony Fargo brought the stock of the shotgun against his shoulder and slid his finger across the trigger. He was down on one knee in the bushes, sighting along the shotgun barrel at the shadowy figures tramping past along the path. His only regret now was that it was too dark to make out who any of the DiMorra men were. He would have liked to make sure of Joe Lucci, especially.

Tony waited until most of the DiMorra men had passed his position. Then he sighted on the lower torso of one of them and squeezed the trigger.

The shotgun's heavy recoil drove it sharply against his shoulder. The concentrated charge of shot bludgeoned the target off his feet and slammed him against a tree. The signal triggered a barrage of shotgun and rifle fire from the other Fargo men strung out behind the right side of the path.

Two more DiMorra men were cut down where they stood. But the rest were already diving into the cover on the other side of the path and striking back with their greater fire power. Steel-jacketed slugs slashed the leaves over Tony's head as he turned and sprinted away in a crouch. His men came running close behind him.

On the other side of the path the DiMorra men couldn't hear the sounds of their departure. Their weapons were making too much noise as they ripped and shredded the bushes and trees where the surprise barrage had come from. Lazzatti, crouching and squinting across the path, saw no answering gun flashes. He began hurrying among the DiMorra soldiers, hissing at them to stop firing. He found Joe Lucci doing the same.

The sudden deathly silence was startling. They peered across the path where their three men lay dead. There was no sound from the other side. Lucci motioned to Lazzatti, who nodded and headed off through the woods with half the survivors. Lucci went in the other direction with the rest.

When they were a good distance from the place where they'd been hit, they darted across the path to the other

side. Cautiously, they converged on the point of ambush. They met without finding anyone.

"Gone," Lazzatti growled angrily. "Hit and run."

"And I'm the one has to tell Angelo about it." Lucci hawked and spat in the dirt. "Come on, let's get back to the cars."

They went carefully this time, fanning out wide to be ready for another ambush. They reached the three cars without incident, circled around them cautiously without finding anybody.

"I told you," Lazzatti said disgustedly. "They're long gone."

He strode to the lead car and got in the front seat, too angry to say anything more, impatient to be gone. His driver got in beside him as Joe Lucci trudged back toward the rear car. Lazzatti turned the key in the ignition.

The explosion knocked Lucci flat to the ground with his ears ringing.

Stunned, his head swimming, Lucci shoved up on his knees and turned to stare open mouthed at the lead car. It was smouldering wreckage. One door had been completely torn off and hurled across the road. Pete Lazzatti hung out of it with most of his clothes ripped off, an unrecognizable lump of shredded flesh and splintered bones.

Lucci stumbled to his feet. The others were doing the same, shaken and dazed, some of them cut by flying glass. One man who had been closest to the explosion lay moaning in the road, a leg torn off. Lucci went over and shot him in the head.

"Let's get out of here!" he snarled.

He didn't have to tell any of those left to keep away from the other two cars. They trudged toward the highway to phone the city for new transportation.

The man who had been a friend of Frank's father drove him through Genoa in his brand-new Mercedes. His name was Manzini, and he had the cheerfulness of a fat man to whom life had been good except that the cheer seldom reached to his eyes.

"The car of the Americans is already waiting in the warehouse," he told Frank as he drove with the reckless flair one finds in Italy. "Also the heroin, all processed and refined, ready to ship. All that remains is to put the heroin in the tires. Which has been arranged."

"I want to test and weigh the stuff before I pay," Frank said.

"But of course. Naturally. There is enough time, the car will not be placed aboard the ship until tomorrow morning, just before it sails."

The Mercedes entered the dock area. "Would you like to eat first?" Manzini suggested. "I know an excellent restaurant near the waterfront. I can recommend it highly."

"No. First I want to get the business over with."

Manzini smiled at him fondly. "Of course. Like your dear father always. Business first; then a good meal, a bottle of wine."

He knowingly threaded the Mercedes through the crowded dock area and drew up alongside a waterfront warehouse. They climbed out of the car, Manzini leading the way to a small side door. He knocked at it in a special way: two knocks, then one, then three. The door was opened from inside. Manzini went in, motioning for Frank to follow.

Frank went after him into a windowless room lit by a small lantern on a rough wooden table. When the door suddenly slammed shut before he could turn to close it, Frank instantly understood.

He started to twist around, grabbing for the gun in his pocket. He froze with two fingers touching the gun. Two heavyset men in dockworkers' clothes stood close to his right. Each held a *lupera,* the stubby little shotgun which was the favorite Sicilian weapon. The man who had slammed the door shut behind him leaned against it, holding a revolver.

Frank felt numb as he turned back to Manzini. "You bastard!"

"No, please . . ." Manzini was genuinely unhappy. "I can't help it. It's not my fault. I love you almost as though

you were my son. But one acquires obligations in this life. Sooner or later comes the time when one must pay them back."

"What about your obligations to my father?" Frank snarled.

"But your dear father is dead. My obligation is to the living. To Don Angelo DiMorra." He shrugged helplessly. "What can I do? It is plain that I have no choice."

Frank could only watch, rigid, as Manzini picked up a bottle of wine from the table, uncorked it, and filled two glasses. He came back to Frank carrying them, held out one glass to Frank.

"No." The muscles of Frank's jaw and throat were so tight he could barely get the word out. He tried not to look at the two men to his right.

"Please . . ." Manzini begged. There were tears in his eyes. He continued to hold one of the glasses out to Frank. "As a favor? Do not go to God with a curse against me on your lips. Please."

Frank found himself mechanically reaching for the glass. Manzini looked relieved and grateful. He sipped a few drops of his own wine.

Frank put the glass to his lips and began to drink it all.

The shotguns boomed like small cannons.

NINETEEN

"ONE DOWN," Joe Lucci said, "and one to go."

"We can't take any credit for Frank Regalbuto," Mitch pointed out dryly. "*That* my brother Angelo got done and nobody else. And that one-to-go ain't anything to smile about either. We ain't any nearer to nailing Tony Fargo than we were when we started."

"We'll get him."

"Sure we'll get him," Mitch agreed sourly. "But how much longer's it gonna take? And how much more damage'll he do us before he goes down?"

Lucci, still smarting from Angelo DiMorra's fury after getting suckered into that ambush, found nothing to say to that.

Mitch swung around in the swivel chair to gaze bleakly out the window of the office over the Majestic Freight Handling Corporation. It was a bright, sunny day, and he could see a lot of the surrounding city. It was becoming increasingly frustrating to know that Tony Fargo was hiding out somewhere in that city or very nearby. One man with whose death all these troubles would end. One hunted man in danger every second he was out there, yet still defying all the authority and power of the DiMorra family.

It didn't occur to Mitch that *he* might be in danger from Tony Fargo.

There was no way anyone could get at him in here. He had turned the whole building into a fortress. There were even men on lookout up on the roof. And all the surrounding buildings were combed through twice a day, so no one could snipe at him from any of them.

Unfortunately for Mitch DiMorra, he could not see through the concrete of the street below.

Tony Fargo squatted in a long tunnel-like pipe, four feet in diameter, made of old, crumbling, slime-dripping concrete. He wore a miner's cap, and the lamp attached to the front of it was lit. Saltis, squatting beside him with the pistol in his hand, had a similar cap and lamp attachment. So did Shorty, the demolition expert.

Tony's lamp shone on the map in his hands. It showed the whole network of sewers under the city. They had come a long way through that slime-slippery, foul-smelling maze to get here. They were in a connection pipe running between two storm drains feeding the main drainage system far below. If Tony had read the map right, they were

directly below the basement floor of the DiMorra headquarters.

It hadn't rained in a couple weeks, but it was still unpleasantly damp in the pipe. And hot and airless. Shorty, half standing at an awkward angle in the confines of the drainage pipe, had to keep wiping sweat from his eyes to see what he was doing.

He had made a hole in the concrete above him. Into it he was placing the explosives. It was delicate and deadly work. That wasn't just dynamite he was working with. There was also the nitro, tricky stuff that had been known on occasion to go off by itself. This was the final placement of explosives. Shorty had already finished two others, connected to this one by the twin leads of the electric wiring.

Tony raised his head, and his lamp shone on the demolition expert's scrawny figure. He was sticking the last of the explosives into the hole. Tony watched him get the ends of the wires and clip the alligator connecting leads into place. With a shaky sigh Shorty let himself sag down between Saltis and Tony, sitting right down in the slime.

"Okay," he whispered wearily. "That's it."

Tony folded the map up and put it away in his pocket. He picked up the submachinegun he'd leaned against the side of the pipe and began crawling. The lamp on his cap illuminated the way ahead, casting a yellow glow into the blackness of the narrow tunnel. Shorty came after him, with Saltis and his target pistol bringing up the rear.

After eighty feet the pipe made a sharp right-angle turn. Once around that corner, Tony was able to see a tiny pinpoint of daylight far ahead. He crawled toward it.

The daylight came in from a rain sewer opening in the street and curb. A box had been placed below it. Tony snapped off his lamp and dropped the cap, climbed up on the box. By standing as straight as he could with the top of his head pressed against the bottom of the pavement above, he could look out of the drain into the street.

He was directly across the street from the back of the DiMorra headquarters. If the target he most wanted survived the blast, he had to come out either this way or

through the front. And Diego Sabitini was in a storm drain across from the front of the DiMorra headquarters, keeping an eye on his watch.

Tony looked at his own watch. Two minutes to go. He hefted the submachinegun in both hands and scanned the street. There was a line of DiMorra cars parked behind the rear of the building. A couple men sat in one of them, smoking and looking around. Another DiMorra soldier strolled the sidewalk over there. They all looked alert, but they couldn't have seen Tony even if they'd looked directly at the sewer opening across the street.

Tony couldn't see the men on the roof, but he knew they were there. It didn't bother him. He was as protected from them as they were from him.

He looked again at his watch, then down at Shorty, who sat beside a small magneto box the wires were plugged into.

"Get set." Tony hissed.

Shorty put his hand on the switch.

Tony waited while the second hand made one more sweep around his watch. "Now!"

Shorty closed the switch.

Diego Sabitini, watching from a sewer opening in the curb across from the front of the DiMorra headquarters, couldn't believe it. He ducked instinctively as the entire building shuddered with the volcanic roar of the triple subterranean explosion. The noise struck his eardrums with such impact that he didn't hear again for two days. All the windows in the building burst outward, and the front door disintegrated with sections of the wall around it. A car parked in front was flung over on its side. Portions of two DiMorra men who'd been standing guard fell into the street along with chunks of cement, plaster, and wood. Smoke and plaster dust poured from gaping holes where the windows and door had been.

A man staggered out through the smoke gushing from the demolished door and fell writhing in the gutter. Sabitini brought his submachinegun up, ready. Another man stumbled out, reached the street and began running away.

Sabitini waited, watching anxiously. A third man came out with a rifle, wandering aimlessly as he coughed out smoke and dust and looked for someone to shoot at. Still Sabitini waited.

Then another man came out, rubbing hs eyes with one hand, holding a gun in the other. He dropped his hand and looked around, dazed, the gun held ready.

Joe Lucci.

Sabitini couldn't hold back any longer. He poked the snout of the submachinegun out through the sewer, pressed the stock hard to his shoulder, and sighted carefully. His finger gave the trigger a touch, just a touch. The gun coughed and bucked against his shoulder, sending a burst of three steel-jacketed bullets streaking across the street.

All three struck Joe Lucci in the chest, dead center, pounding him backward against the ruined wall. Sabitini fired another burst, the bullets keeping Lucci's limp figure nailed to the wall. When Sabitini took his finger from the trigger, Joe Lucci's body slid down in an inert heap.

The guy with the rifle was running back, desperately trying to spot the machinegunner. Sabitini flipped a burst at him. One of the slugs caught the man in the hip and flung him around like a broken doll.

Bullets from somewhere else began slapping the street directly in front of Sabitini. One of them ricocheted into the sewer, just missing his ear. Time to go.

He jumped down from his box. Jorge Garcia was waiting below on his knees, wearing a head lamp and carrying a map in his hand. Together, they began to make their escape through the sewer system.

Out in back of the DiMorra building Tony Fargo was still waiting, the machinegun pressed to his shoulder. There were a lot of men milling about out there by now; some from inside the building, others who'd come running from other guard positions along the street. But the target he was waiting for still hadn't appeared, and Tony couldn't stay where he was much longer.

Chances were, the one he wanted was already dead inside. Or had gone out the front . . .

He was about to fire a burst and leave, when Mitch DiMorra walked out through the smoke and dust. He kept his face covered with both hands until he was clear of the smoke. When he dropped his hands, Tony fired.

He fired a long, low burst, swinging the gun in a tight little arc. Mitch DiMorra's legs were smashed out from under him, slamming him down in the street on his face.

The machinegun bucked and roared again, held low and steady this time. One after another the bullets plunged into Mitch DiMorra, rolling his body against the curb, then kicking him over it onto the pavement.

A brother for a brother . . .

The DiMorra soldiers were scattering for cover, looking for the enemy. Then one of them spotted him and dropped flat, firing at the sewer. Others twisted around to join him.

Tony dodged down off the box. Shorty and Saltis were already on their way. Tony went to his hands and knees and began crawling after them.

The police arrived at the same time as the fire engines. By then there was no longer any hope of saving the DiMorra headquarters from the consuming blaze. And by the time anyone went down into the sewer system to look for the assassins, they had long since emerged from it ten blocks away and were gone.

". . . Joe Lucci." The voice on the phone paused, weakening. "And your brother Mitch. I . . . I'm sorry to have to be the one to tell you, Don Angelo. He must've taken sixteen slugs. It was a terrible thing to see . . ."

Angelo DiMorra put down the phone in his den as though it had become too heavy to hold. He laid his hands flat on his desk and watched the fingers trembling uncontrollably.

Raising and turning his hands very slowly, he put his face down into them. He stayed that way for a long time. But he wasn't crying. He was just very, very tired. It was so many days since he'd had enough sleep.

But now he thought he would be able to sleep. That was what he needed most. A long nap to restore him before he had to begin thinking again.

Pushing his hands against the desk, he shoved himself to his feet. His legs were leaden as they carried him slowly out of the room. He had to grasp the banister to help pull himself up the steps to his bedroom.

He stopped there and looked toward the bathroom. The doctor had warned him about taking any strong sleeping pills. But he had to sleep this time. And if he began thinking, he wouldn't be able to. He went into the bathroom and took the pill. And stripped off his clothes, dropping them on the bathroom floor and not looking at himself in the mirror. Exhaustion dragged at every part of him.

He barely managed to make it back to the bedroom and into his pajamas. When he stretched out at last on the big bed, he passed out immediately, before the pill could take effect.

He was awakened by the pain that wrenched his entire side from his head down to his foot. It twisted and knotted him violently before suddenly releasing him from its clutch. He sprawled back limp on the bed. Fingers of ice were squeezing his entire brain. He tried to cry out. But he found that he couldn't.

They found him that way three hours later: alive but completely paralyzed. Unable to move or speak.

III

LONG LIVE THE DON

TWENTY

JIMMY BRUNO came out of prison looking fit and ready to go back to work.

His blunt-featured face was pale, but his short, stocky body was as strong as ever, if gone a little soft around the middle. And his dark eyes still had the same look: hooded, hiding his thoughts as they probed deep into the other man.

They studied the two men waiting for him outside the prison. One was The Accountant, who had run things in his absence. The other was Marty Rackheimer, a former pro halfback who had been Bruno's bodyguard before he got sent up. Rackheimer and The Accountant had never liked each other. So while Bruno was away, he had spent most of his time up in Bruno's lodge in the mountains, hunting and fishing. Now he was back.

He shook Bruno's hand fervently without a word. He wasn't much given to talking.

Then The Accountant shook Bruno's hand and said, "It's good to have you back, boss."

"I'm not back yet," Bruno said drily. "Let's go home."

As they got in the car, The Accountant asked, "Mind if we stop at my place first? Marie's got a big meal getting ready for you."

"Suits me. I can use some decent food for a change."

Rackheimer got behind the wheel. The Accountant got in back with Jimmy Bruno, filling him in on what had been happening as they rode toward the city. Most of it Bruno already knew: with DiMorra completely out of commission, his people were falling away from him fast. And Tony Fargo, with no one to oppose him, had been

busy picking up all the pieces. It was all flowing to him now: the DiMorra troops and the DiMorra enterprises.

"What about you?" Bruno asked quietly. "You been picking up any of the pieces for us?"

The Accountant made a helpless grimace. "Frankly, Jimmy, I think I've done a damn good job in just managing to hold on to what you already had. Everybody's scared to death of Tony Fargo. They look at what he did when he was up against all of DiMorra's organization, and they figure nothing and nobody can stop him now that DiMorra's out of the action."

He drew a breath. "I figured it was best to wait with you due to get out. Now that you're here, we can start thinking about how to eliminate him."

Jimmy Bruno looked out at the scenery whipping past. "You're going too fast," he growled at his bodyguard.

"No, I'm not. It's just you're not used to cars anymore."

Bruno laughed without smiling. "That's a fact. Slow down anyway."

Rackheimer did so.

Jimmy Bruno turned back to The Accountant. "From what I been hearing, it's already too late for that. Tony's too big now to eliminate. Now we'll have to negotiate. No choice."

The Accountant had to force himself to meet Bruno's probing, hooded eyes. "I did the best I could. What I thought was best for your interests. I had to play along with Tony a little, let him think I was on his side. If I'd gone against him, Jimmy, I'd have risked losing everything that belongs to you. That wouldn't have been a smart move, would it?"

Bruno continued to study him without expression a while longer. Then he said, "I guess not." He looked out the window at the passing countryside again. "Rack," he snapped, "you're still going too fast."

Rackheimer sighed and slowed down even more.

* * *

The meal in the Orlandos' home section of the Starlite Motel was excellent, as promised. Marie Orlando, in a new evening gown cut very low over her ripe bosom, officiated at the head of the table while the meal was served by a caterer. Bruno devoured everything, proving his appetite was still there.

When they had finished and were being served coffee, Marie suggested afterdinner drinks.

"First, I got a private call to make," Bruno said. "You got a phone in here that don't go through the switchboard?"

The Accountant nodded. "In my den."

Bruno stood up. "I may be awhile."

He went into the den, shut the door and phoned Tony Fargo.

It was half an hour before he returned to the dining room. The table had been cleared and Marie Orlando was alone at it with a bottle and two small glasses.

Bruno sat down with her. "I can use that drink now."

Marie poured. "Cognac. Your favorite brand."

Bruno sipped and sighed with pleasure. "Well, Marie, what's new with you?"

"If you mean girls, I've got some new beauties for you. Be my guest. If you mean business, that's beautiful, too. Want to see the books?"

Bruno laughed. "Later. On both offers. Where's Louie?"

"Out in the office, taking care of a little business."

Bruno eyed her over the glass. "And what's new with *him?* Your husband been behaving himself while I was gone? Being a good boy?"

She opened her mouth to say yes. Then she shut it and thought again. It was something in the way he was looking at her. She suddenly realized that her life depended on what she said next.

When The Accountant returned to the dining room, Jimmy Bruno was alone, sipping a second glass of cognac.

"Louis," he said, "I think it's time we went and paid my respects to Don Angelo. Before it gets dark."

Angelo DiMorra was in a wheelchair, sitting on the terrace, watching the sun go down over his lake, when they got there. With him were a new bodyguard and a male nurse who was part of the family. Bruno, coming onto the terrace with The Accountant and Rackheimer, stopped dead when he saw what had become of his old friend.

DiMorra was being spoonfed by the male nurse. His arms hung limp on either side of the wheelchair. His face was wasted; his body, wrapped in a long bathrobe, was shrunken. No part of him moved except his eyes. He couldn't even turn his head. The male nurse had to turn his wheelchair to face him toward his visitors.

Bruno, crying without shame, went to DiMorra and kissed him. There was no response; no movement, no sound. Straightening, Bruno wiped the tears from his eyes and got himself under control.

"Angie," he said thickly, "it's good to see you again. I brought you a present."

He looked at Rackheimer and gestured at The Accountant. "Grab him."

Rackheimer moved so fast that The Accountant found himself being held with his arms pinned behind his back before he fully registered what Bruno had said. He stared at Bruno. "Jimmy . . . what're you doing?"

"I trusted you, Louis." Bruno's voice was dead flat. "And you went and got together with the Fargos to cut me and Don Angelo out."

The Accountant's shock was genuine. "Who told you a thing like that?"

"Your wife."

"It's a lie! *She's* the one! I was going to tell you, Jimmy!" The Accountant's voice had risen to a shriek. "I swear to you, Jimmy, this isn't true! Be sensible! Let me sit down and tell you how it was!"

"Rack," Bruno said, "I can't take all that noise."

Rackheimer shut off the screams with one huge hand.

He continued to hold the thin wrists easily with the other hand. The Accountant's struggles were as useless as those of a mouse trying to get free of a lion.

Bruno looked at DiMorra's bodyguard. "Get some tape. And a plastic bag."

"Plastic bag?"

"Yeah. Like they put food into. Or clothes, so the moths don't get at them."

DiMorra's bodyguard nodded and hurried into the house.

Bruno looked at the male nurse. "Take a walk."

The man hurried away, out of sight. Bruno sat down in a chair facing DiMorra. "I made a terrible mistake, Angie. I admit it. I trusted this piece of shit, and he shivved us. What he did is responsible for the way you are now. My fault, Angie. I'm sorry. I got to make up to you for that."

DiMorra's bodyguard came out with a big roll of tape. Rackheimer clamped a hand around The Accountant's throat to hold his head in place. Thick strips of tape quickly muffled his shouts. The two bodyguards taped The Accountant's wrists behind him; then taped his ankles together. They dumped him at the feet of Bruno and DiMorra.

"The bag," Bruno said. DiMorra's bodyguard got it from his pocket, gave it to Bruno. It was a medium-sized clear plastic food container. "For you, Angie," Bruno said and bent down with it.

The Accountant tried to flop away. Rackheimer pinned him still with one knee. Bruno pulled the bag over The Accountant's head and face. It just fitted. The instant it was in place the plastic was sucked up into The Accountant's nostrils. It was blown out, then sucked in again.

"Close the bottom," Bruno said.

Rackheimer put his hands around the bottom of the bag, closing it around The Accountant's neck. The plastic began to be sucked in deeper, come out less. The inside of it started to fog. The Accountant's eyes bulged as he squirmed and twisted in a vain effort to get free. But with surprising swiftness his movements got weaker.

Jimmy Bruno and Angelo DiMorra sat there and watched him suffocate to death.

When it was over, Bruno said, "Take him in the woods and bury him. Deep."

Rackheimer bent and picked up the limp figure, slung it over one shoulder.

Bruno looked at DiMorra's bodyguard. "Help him."

When they were gone, Bruno looked at DiMorra again. He leaned back in his chair and began speaking quietly to his friend, who could not answer. "Now, Angie, let's discuss what we're going to do about the Fargo boy . . ."

DiMorra's eyes watched him, alert.

"The way I see it, you've had enough war in this city to last a long time. We both know that ain't good for business. We need a long peace to repair the damage and get the profits flowing in like they used to. And one thing's definite: Tony Fargo's too strong now to knock over without a war. A real long war. Am I right?"

DiMorra's eyes watched him.

"So I say, call it quits. He hurt you; you hurt him. Enough. Let bygones be bygones. And then all of us'll do good."

Bruno leaned forward and put his hand on DiMorra's thin knee, looking directly into those alert eyes. "So I called and had a talk with him. The only sensible way is to split the city in half. He runs half; I run half—making sure you get all you're entitled to, of course. You know you can depend on that."

DiMorra's eyes slid away from him to the lake.

Bruno leaned back again. "It's the only way I can see to do it, Angie. Remember what you always said? Whenever possible, negotiate; kill only when there's no other way. Remember?"

DiMorra's eyes continued to stare across the lake, watching the sun go down into it.

"Angie," Bruno said, "the way things are, it looks like I have to act for both you and me in both our interests. You'll just have to trust that I'm doing the right thing. Okay?"

Bruno stood up and put a hand on his friend's shoulder and looked off in the same direction. For a time Jimmy Bruno and Angelo DiMorra remained that way—watching darkness come over the lake.

When Tony Fargo came down the steps after putting the oldest of the kids to bed, Nella was on the sofa, watching TV. She had already set a bottle of wine and two glasses on the coffee table. It was white wine.

Tony rumpled her hair affectionately as he sat down close beside her.

"Don't do that," she giggled. "I want to watch this. It's a good one."

Tony sighed and settled back on the couch, looking at the movie on the TV screen. He was surprised to find that he was actually watching it after a while, his attention held. He settled more comfortably, feeling everything right and relaxed, the way it was supposed to be.

The phone rang. He got up and answered it. It was Jimmy Bruno.

Tony looked at Nella. She got up and went into the kitchen.

"I just came from seeing him," Bruno's voice was saying over the phone. "Everything's gonna work out fine, Don Antonio . . ."

PARKER . . .

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